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Galaxy

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Robert Silverberg *The Man Who Came Back*
Ursula K. Le Guin *Escape Routes*

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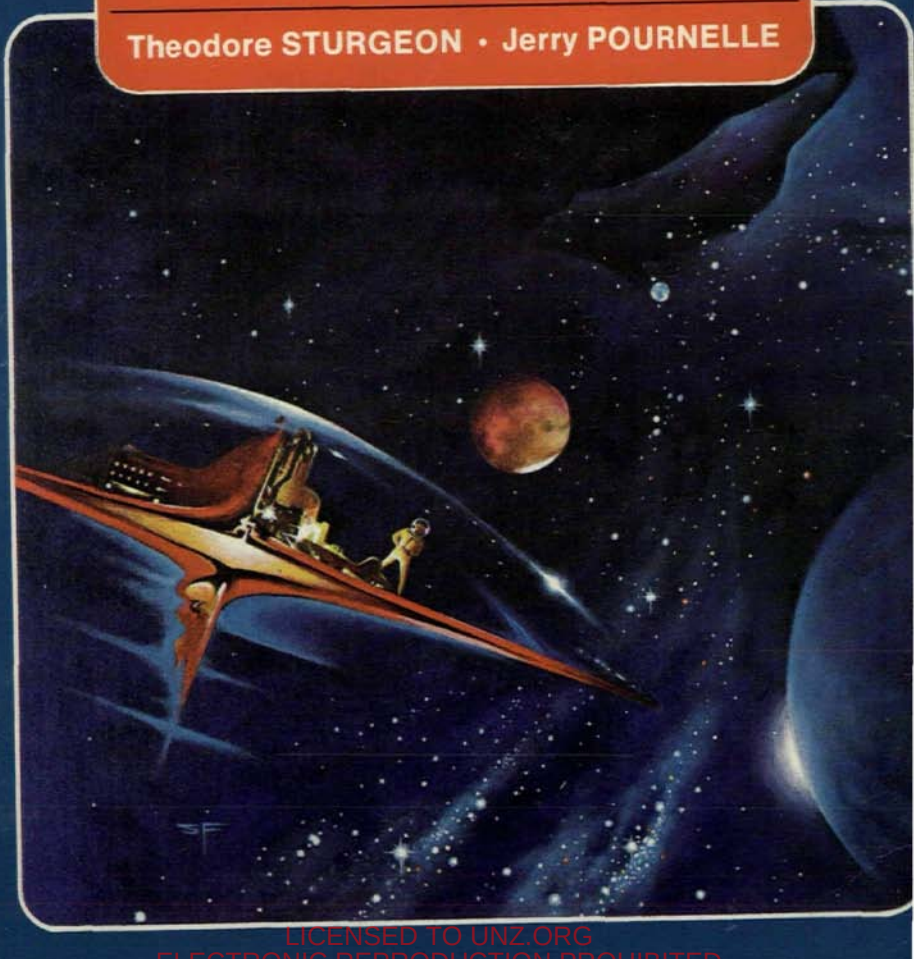

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Galaxy SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

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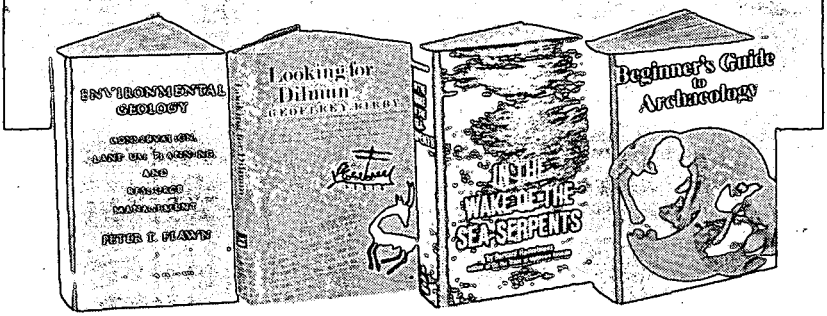

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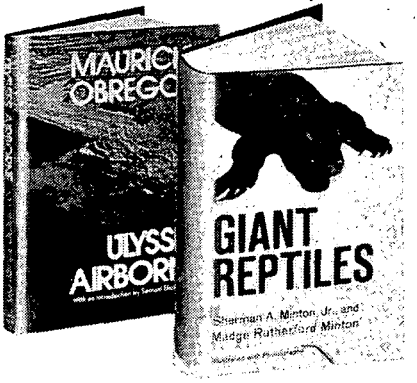

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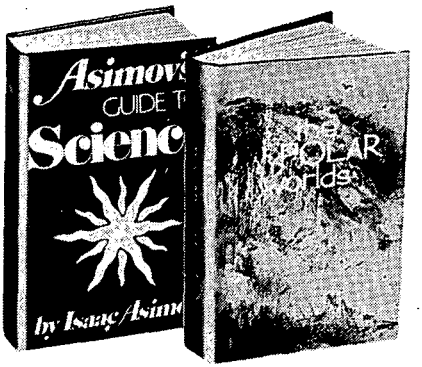

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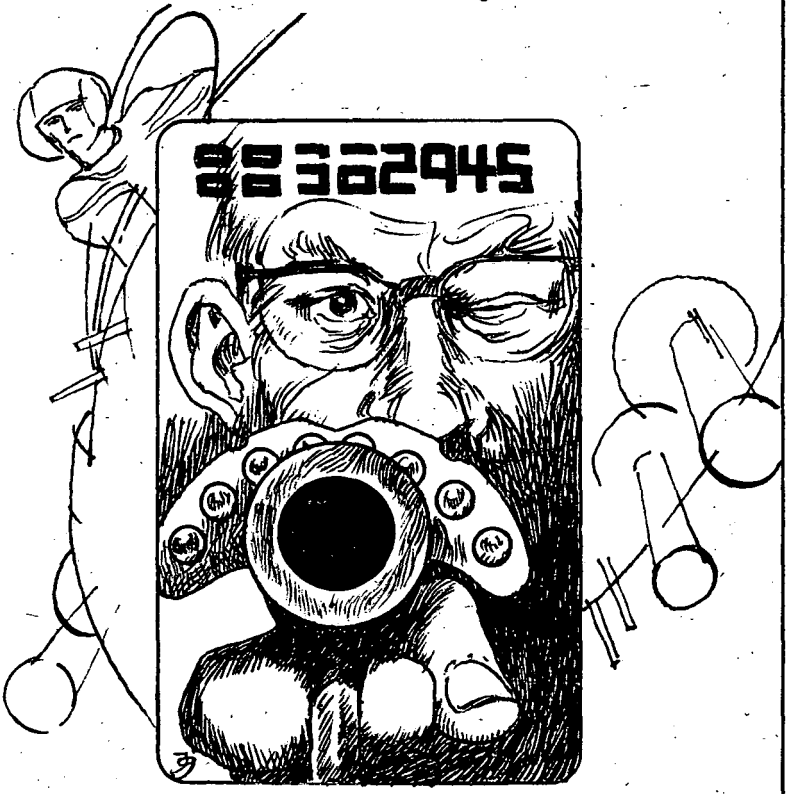

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MACK REYNOLDS

And the men of the village said unto him, "If whilst ye guard the sheep a wolf appears, then blow thy horn and cry 'Wolf' and we will come to succor thee."

—Old Fairy Story

UP UNTIL then, it had been an unusually uneventful night, they hadn't even descended once. But now the screen lit up with large red letters and numbers, H-13 K-22.

A voice said urgently, "Emergency distress signal from citizen with wrist alarm."

Patrolman Jim Kelly hit the drop lever with the butt of his right hand and they started down.

His partner knew the coordinates of their patrol area by heart. Tad Boleslaw snapped, "Corner of Locust and MacArthur. And, by Christ, there they are."

The police helio-jet came swooping in.

"On the ball, Tad," Kelly said, voice tense.

But Tad Boleslaw was already whipping his Police .38 Recoilless from its quick draw holster, his hand on the door next to him. They could make out two figures below, in the otherwise deserted streets.

"Stick-up romp," Kelly growled.

The other patrolman didn't bother to answer that obvious statement.

Between the two small figures below there was suddenly a lance of flame.

"Oh, Christ, he nailed him," Boleslaw groaned. "Well, at least we'll get the bastard."

When they swept in, one of the figures was sprawled over the gutter, half his body in the street, half on the sidewalk. Boleslaw vaulted out while they were still five or six feet off the ground and went charging up, .38 in hand.

"Drop that gun!" he yelled.

The other was standing, facing him, his hands at his sides and two feet or so out from his body. He had a gun in his right.

He said, "I'd rather not. It might damage it."

"Drop that gun," Boleslaw said dangerously. He had come to a halt.

"Why not just take it from me?" the other said mildly. "You've got me covered."

The patrolman scowled. This was a new one.

Kelly came running up, weapon in hand. He circled around, taking care not to get in the potential line of fire, came up behind the other and grabbed the gun in question. He slipped it into a pocket and gave

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the gunman a thorough frisking.

"Keep him covered," he told his partner and went over and stared down at the body. There was a gaping hole in the fallen one's chest, the blood had already stopped pulsing. It was a youngster, probably in his late teens. Near his right hand was an old fashioned automatic pistol.

Kelly turned back to the man Boleslaw was covering. "You the one sent in the emergency alarm on the wrist gismo?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"Stick-up, I guess."

Boleslaw said, "You must be awful quick on the draw if you took him when he already had you covered."

"Thanks. I guess he wasn't expecting me to be armed. When he heard your cruiser coming in, he looked up . . . startled. That was long enough."

The two patrolmen sized him up. He was an unprepossessing man somewhere in his early fifties. He was a bit under average in size and could have used another ten pounds or so. He wore a mustache, and shouldn't have; he didn't have enough hair on his upper lip. He also wore spectacles, which were rapidly becoming an anachronism in these days of eye surgery and the new model contact lenses.

Kelly thought inwardly, "No wonder the kid let him get the drop on him. He doesn't look as though he could kill time."

But then something else came to him and he said, "Aren't you Buddy Brothers? Seems to me I've seen you down at the pistol range."

"I'm getting a little old to be called Buddy any more. The name's Charles Brothers. Yes, I'm kind of a junior member of the Police Pistol Team. I can't compete because I'm only a CAP. I'm a member of the City Auxiliary Police." He added, a touch of pride there, "It's too bad, because I can shoot circles around most of the boys."

Patrolman Boleslaw said, in response to the incoming whine of sirens, "Here comes the meatwagon. This won't take long, Mr. Brothers. Then we'll run you down to headquarters and you can make a statement."

"Sure, boys. I've been through this before."

Tad Boleslaw eyed him in surprise and said, "You have?"

"Yes," Brothers said, looking about as though in explanation. "This is a pretty tough neighborhood."

"What in the hell are you doing here, this time of the night?"

"Walking home from work. I'm on the swing shift. I get off at midnight."

Two vehicles, one an ambulance, came swooping in. Uniformed officers, a plainclothesman and two white jacketed younger men with a stretcher spilled out.

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The plainclothesman, obviously in charge, looked over the scene without change of expression. He had seen the scene before, though usually roles were reversed. Usually, it was the citizen stretched out on the street, the stick-up man caught, gun in hand, or shot down when he tried to resist or escape. Kelly handed the gun over to him.

The newcomer was a little gone to weight, was tired of eyes and his hat, shoved back, indicated that he was beginning to bald. He smoked a well charred, short pipe.

He said to Patrolman Boleslaw, "What happened, Tad?"

The other told him.

The plainclothesman looked at Brothers closely and said, "I'm Detective Lieutenant Norman Schmidt. You got a permit for this pistol you used on the punk?"

"Yes, sir."

"You don't have to call me sir," the detective replied. "You're a citizen and, I assume, a taxpayer. I work for the city."

The smaller man nodded. "I'm a member of the City Auxiliary Police, acting patrolman when on duty. I was helping you that time you led the squad against the Dolly Teeter gang . . . sir."

The other pretended to remember him now. "Oh, yeah," he said. "Well, good work, Brothers. Tad, you and Jim take him down to headquarters and make out a routine statement. Check his identity, so forth. Check out his gun permit." He turned his eyes back to Brothers. "No crud, but technically you're under arrest . . . technically. You'll sleep in your own bed tonight."

"Thanks, sir. I suppose I'm a little upset. Uh, your men are certainly efficient. I have to congratulate you all. They were here in possibly half a minute after I activated my emergency distress alarm."

THE NEXT evening, before going onto his shift, Tad Boleslaw drifted into Lieutenant Schmidt's office. They were moderately good friends, considering the difference in rank. Tad's father and Schmidt had both been sergeants when the former had been killed in line of duty. The lieutenant knew that the younger man was bucking for the detective squad but didn't have the seniority as yet.

Schmidt had a marking stylo in his hand and was sourly checking out a report. He didn't like tapework and, God knew, there was enough of it these days.

He said, "Cheers, Tad. What spins with you?" He ran a freckled hand back over his less than generously haired head.

Tad pulled up one of the steel chairs of the drab police office, without invitation.

He said, scowling a little, "I was wondering about that gunning last night."

The older man tossed his stylo to

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the desk, glad of the opportunity to scuttle it, and reached for his well soured pipe. "What gunning? There were four. Center City is getting to be like a shooting gallery. Oh, you mean the one you and Jim Kelly were in on. What about it?"

"I don't know. It was something Brothers said. He said it wasn't the first time he'd gone through this. He doesn't exactly look the Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickock type. But last night he evidently drew on that young funker while the kid was leveled down on him."

Schmidt laughed, even as he loaded the briar. "This Charles Brothers I checked out, just as routine. In spite of his looks, he's an Asian War hero. Bronze Star. He's seen a gun or so before."

Tad said, "All right, but for crissakes what's he doing living in that neighborhood? And, if he does, what in the hell's he doing walking back and forth to work at night? Why doesn't he drive or at least take public transportation? We've got a pretty good vacuum transport metro in this town these days. He could get to within a block of his house on it."

The lieutenant contemplated him, even as he lit his pipe. "What are you getting at, Tad?"

"He said he'd been through it before. How many times?"

Schmidt said, "Like I say, I checked him out just as routine. He's one of the first citizens in Center City to buy an emergency alarm wrist device. And he was one of the first to use it. Two Blacks jumped him and he had it out with them. By the time the patrol boys got there, he had finished them off. We were looking for both of them, since they both had nice long records in the Crime Data Banks. One had a gun we were also looking for since a slug from it had chilled one of the citizens over in Far Cry. The other's gun wasn't hot, so far as we know."

Tad said, "That was the first time. You mean that there were more?"

"The next time, the man who tried to mug him didn't have a crime dossier. Nothing at all. Brothers nailed him before the funker got a single shot off. That gyro-jet rocket pistol he carries needs exactly one hit to demolish King Kong or Moby Dick."

"How was the mugger armed?"

The lieutenant said, "With one of these bureau-drawer specials left over from the old days when you could buy these foreign made war-surplus shooters for about fifteen dollars apiece. No record of the serial number, of course."

"They're getting kind of scarce these days."

"What are you building up to?"

"Damn if I know. How did that gun the kid had last night check out?"

"Same thing. You can still pick them up in that slob neighborhood for a few pseudo-dollars. What in

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the hell's roaching you, Tad?" The lieutenant had gotten his pipe going well. It stank.

The patrolman said unhappily, "Walking home at night, in that neighborhood. It looks like he's asking for it. His luck can't last forever."

Schmidt shrugged lardy shoulders. "The guy's got guts. He's not afraid of these punks. If more citizens were like him, had his courage, the muggers wouldn't be on the streets. I told you, he's even got medals. You think a bunch of funkers looking for bread to buy their next fix are going to scare him off the streets of the city?"

Tad said sourly, "They're either going to or he's going to wind up in the gutter himself one of these nights. He's had more shoot-outs than most of the patrolmen on the force."

He came to his feet, preparatory to leaving but the lieutenant pulled out a drawer, reached in and came up with a gyro-jet rocket pistol.

He said, "This is Brothers' gun. All charges have been dropped against him, of course. When you and Jim Kelly get over that neighborhood, take it back to him."

Tad Boleslaw took the weapon and looked at it distastefully. "I don't like these things," he said. "Too much gun. You hit a man, just anywhere at all, and if he doesn't go down you walk around behind him to see what's holding him up. Suppose somebody's running and you want to shoot him in the leg to stop him. You shoot him with one of these and it'd blow his leg off and he'd probably bleed to death before you could get medical help."

"Yeah," Schmidt said around his pipe stem, "but you're a cop and sometimes the occasion comes up when you want to shoot some funker who's running in the leg. But Brothers carries his shooter for self defense and when you're defending your life the more punch you have on hand the better."

"I suppose so," Tad said, still not happy. "See you later, Norm."

SINCE Brothers had told them he worked the swing shift, Tad and Jim Kelly put off going to his home until about one in the morning.

Even knowing the neighborhood both of the patrolmen were surprised at the squalid, aged apartment house that the man lived in.

The whole ward was a blot on the city and periodically the city fathers drew up plans to renovate it. Nothing seemed to come of them. Popularly, it was known as the last of the slums and the residents were aliens and others not eligible to collect the federal Guaranteed Annual Income, which was sufficient to enable the unemployed or pensioners to rent a small apartment in a decent high-rise apartment house, or even a place out in the suburbs. You didn't live very high on the hog on GAI but you

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lived adequately. One of the reasons for the high crime rate in this neighborhood was because so many of the residents were felons on the lam, military deserters, or others afraid to register for GAI since they couldn't reveal their correct identity.

But it was unlikely that Charles Brothers would live here.

They parked their helio-jet patrol vehicle before the building and both got out. They looked up at the aged structure; it must have been well over a century old.

"Some joint," Jim said. "Let's go. I hate to leave our heap here. In this vicinity, somebody might steal it."

They went up the stone steps to the door. There was no identity screen. Instead, there were eight names and eight old fashioned electric buttons there. One of the name plates read Charles and Tilly Brothers. Apartment Six. Tad pressed the appropriate button and shortly the door buzzed. Jim opened it and they went into a dimly lit hall. There was no elevator. They started up the stairs.

Apartment Six was on the third floor. Evidently, there were two flats per floor. Jim knocked at the door.

There was a peephole set into it and the two patrolmen could detect an eye taking them in.

The door opened and Charles Brothers was there in shirtsleeves, pants and slippers.

He said, "Yes? What can I do for you?"

Tad said, "The lieutenant sent us over to return your gun, Mr. Brothers. All charges against you have been dropped."

"Why, come on in boys."

They followed him into a living room. In actuality, once inside the apartment it wasn't badly done at all. It was very well, very tastefully, furnished and there were paintings on the walls that were obviously originals.

A girl got up from the couch where she had been, of all things, knitting. Who ever heard of women knitting in this age? She looked at them nervously.

She was not an unattractive young woman. About twenty-five, Tad would say. Nice brown hair worn rather long as styles went these days, pleasant figure just a very little on the dumpy side and, like Charles Brothers himself, she wore glasses. If anything, they rather enchanced her blue eyes. Her clothes were a good twenty years out of date.

Brothers said, "Gentlemen, this is my daughter, Tilly. Tilly, these officers came to my rescue last night." He added apologetically, "I don't believe I got your names."

Tad grinned at her, his cap already in hand, and said, "He didn't need to be rescued. I'm Patrolman Tadeusz Boleslaw and this is Patrolman James Kelly."

Brothers looked at him and said,

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"Are you a foreigner?"

Tad frowned and said, "Why, no. My father was of Polish descent and my mother German but they were both second generation Americans. Why?"

Brothers said uncomfortably, "I don't like foreigners. I'd offer you boys a drink but I no longer use the stuff myself. It cuts down your reflexes. For that matter, I don't hold with keeping it in the house."

Kelly said, "We can't drink on duty anyway."

And Tilly said in a small, distinct, sweet voice, "Coffee, perhaps?"

Tad smiled at her. "Afraid we don't have the time, Ms. Brothers. We'll take a rain check." He looked at her father, preparatory to leaving. He had already handed over the gyro-jet pistol. He said, "Hope you don't have to use that again, sir."

"I trust I won't, but I like to be prepared. These gook slum elements have to be kept down."

Jim said, "I hope you didn't walk home tonight through this neighborhood."

"Why, yes, of course I did," the other told him, a touch of indignation in his voice. "I do every night. I have a sedentary job and need the exercise."

"Unarmed?"

The small man shook his head, as though smug. "No. I had another gun. I collect guns."

Tad nodded, as though that figured and said, "Well, goodnight. Nice to have met you, Ms. Brothers."

On the way down the steps, Tad muttered, "That's a funny set-up there."

Kelly looked at him from the side of his eyes. "How do you mean?"

"I don't know."

Back on their patrol over the city, Tad said, "Did you notice that the girl wore an emergency wrist alarm too?"

"Why not? I wish the hell every citizen did," Jim told him. "Biggest thing to hinder crime we've ever had. The Federal Enforcement Assistance Administration came up with the first primitive one way back in the 1970s. But they're really efficient now. A citizen is confronted with an emergency and activates his wrist alarm. The computers, within less than a second, get a cross on his location and beam a message to the nearest patrol vehicles both surface and air. Wizard! We're on the scene, often in less than a minute. How can you beat it? Burglaries, for instance, have just about disappeared. And rape? Any girl with a wrist alarm is as safe as in her mother's arms."

"I guess you're right," Tad said. "Everybody ought to wear one, especially if they're often in situations open to violence."

Jim was suddenly scowling. "You know," he said, "it just came to me, talking about wrist emergency

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alarms. Brothers wasn't wearing one last night."

"What're you talking about? How could he have sent in that emergency call, if he didn't have an alarm?"

"I'm not saying he didn't have one. I'm just saying he wasn't wearing one on his wrist. Remember when I frisked him? I ran my hands up his forearms. I always do, to check for knives or little hide-out pistols. He wasn't wearing anything on his wrists, even a watch."

"He probably had it in a pocket," Ted said.

"Why? They make those alarms as big as they are so that potential stick-up men or muggers, or whatever, can see them and be scared off. There's not much point in hiding your wrist alarm."

They flew in silence for a time until Tad said, "What got me was the uncomfortable atmosphere. The girl seemed afraid."

Jim looked over at him quizzically. "Afraid of what? Not a couple of cops. Hell, her father's a cop himself, in a way. Volunteer in the City Auxiliary Police. From what he told Lieutenant Schmidt, he evidently was in that shoot-out with Dolly Teeter's mob."

"I don't mean immediately afraid," Tad said slowly. "I mean a long time afraid. There was a feeling of fear in that apartment."

"Jesus," Jim said. "You going mystical on me?"

THE following day was one of Tad's free days. He was a fitful sleeper, especially when working a late shift. But his sleeping the night before—mostly in the early morning hours had been worse than usual. He'd slept about three hours and had then come awake and spent the next four or five in that half-sleep in which you usually worry about something or other.

He couldn't get Charles Brothers off his mind. The whole thing didn't ring true. Okay, what Norm Schmidt had said was believable. The guy was a war hero who had won medals and wasn't about to truckle to a bunch of cheap hoods. He went armed and provided with a police emergency wrist alarm and he was ready and able to take on anybody who gave him trouble. But something still didn't quite ring true. In all, Brothers had killed four of these young funkers. Four! He hadn't simply wounded a single one. All were dead by the time the police got to the scene. Of course, using a gyro-jet pistol would account for that. But still. Four. In all of his police years, Tad Boleslaw had killed exactly one man. And he was sorry about that. He should have been able to bring the other down without killing him. A prowler had run up an alley with Tad in full pursuit. It proved to be a dead end. The man turned and pulled a gun. Tad had tried to wing him but he had shot too hurriedly, fearing that the other would shoot

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first. He had got him in the belly. The ambulance, for once, had taken hell's own time to get to the scene. Everything went wrong. The poor bastard was DOA at the hospital.

Of course, Tad had nicked several others in his time, some of them pretty badly, but he had only killed one. But *four*, for crissakes, and the man wasn't even a real cop.

Since he was a bachelor and impatient of larger quarters, Tad lived in a mini-apartment in a moderately sized high-rise apartment house. There were some five hundred apartments in the building and he doubted if he knew half a dozen of the people who were supposedly his neighbors. It suited him, and his way of life, but he knew that this existence was rapidly becoming unpopular with most. Too ant-like.

The big cities were breaking up and the inhabitants, lemming-like, were streaking out into the boondocks, some to small communities, some to even more isolated existence, or mobile towns. People's Capitalism, as some called it, allowed for not only Guaranteed Annual Income, but also provided each family in the land one free residence, or mobile home. In actuality, you could apply for yours, get it—there was a certain maximum amount of pseudo-dollars you were allowed to expend—and then sell it the very next day, if you wished. But from then on you either had to buy another place on your own, or rent. There was a certain method in the seeming madness. It was a way of counter-balancing the fall off economically when so much of the military spending had been discontinued. The billions formerly expended on so-called defense were put into construction and into other fields, such as ecology and the rebuilding of the environment.

All for the best, he assumed, although Tad Boleslaw was precious little interested in such subjects as socio-economics. He was a dedicated cop and a good one. He found it a satisfactory manner of making a living, though unromantic, usually drab and laborious. He had a moderately good education and had also had two tours at the FBI school. He studied every issue of such technical publications as *Criminology, Police Science* and the *Journal of Criminal Law*. He had a distinguished marksman rating, and two citations on his record. After training, he had moved up from probation through the two patrolman grades and had his fingers crossed about getting detective status in the reasonably near future.

He finally gave up any hopes of further sleep, got up and flicked the button which slid his bed into the wall where it would be made-up with fresh bedclothes. Thank the powers that were for automated

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housekeeping.

He went through his usual morning bathroom routine then went into the so-called kitchenette, sat down at the small table and dialed breakfast from the automated kitchens in the basement. And thank the gods for them, too. Tad was of the tribe that couldn't even make a decent pot of coffee.

He was so preoccupied that he didn't taste his food, and was mildly surprised to find the meal was over. He threw the dishes and utensils into the disposal and turned back into the livingroom-cum-bedroom-cum-study.

He went over to his desk and dialed the National Data Banks on his screen.

He said verbally, rather than dialing for his information, "I want the dossier of Charles Brothers." He opened his police notebook and flicked to the page he had used the night before and read off the identification code of his subject.

The screen said, "What is your classification, please? Are you eligible to request a citizen's dossier?"

"Police officer," he said, and put his identification card on the appropriate square of the screen.

And there was the life of Charles Brothers. Very cold was a citizen's dossier, very sterile. But all the information was there. Had Tad been interested, grandparents, parents, date of birth, doctor presiding at birth, etc. etc. Health from his earliest years, every time he had medical attention, every childhood disease from the first months, every other visit to a doctor, up to and through any venereal disease he might have picked up in Asia during the war, etc., etc.

Brothers had a high-school education as they had called it in those days. Evidently, average student. As a matter of fact he seemed average all ways from Tuesday. Tad got to the war years. His subject had been drafted and had seemingly been a good soldier, rising to the rank of sergeant. Four years in the infantry. Which would seem to have been plenty.

And then Tad Boleslaw came to his first discrepancy. The other's military discharge status was blank.

Strange. He flicked a switch and said, "What type of discharge was Charles Brothers given?" He repeated the other's identification code.

The screen said, "That information is restricted."

Tad blinked. "Why?"

"That information is also restricted."

He'd be damned. He went on with the dossier. Following the war, Brothers had taken training in operating IBM machines. He had seemingly been good at it and got promotions. He was currently being paid three hundred pseudo-dollars a week as a shift supervisor in an installation in an ultra-market.

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Three hundred pseudo-dollars a week! And living in a dump like that? Well, not really a dump. The apartment was pleasant enough. But in that cheap ghetto? That slum?

He went on. Married. Divorced a couple of years ago. One child. Tilly.

Yes, Tilly. The scared girl. Scared of what?

He ran into his second surprise. Organizations to which the other belonged. Brothers had applied to join the National Guard. Application refused. Reason restricted.

Application refused! To a war hero?

He sunk back into his chair for a moment, then flicked his switch again and said, "What classification is needed to receive the information about Charles Brothers' military discharge and his application refusal to join the National Guard?"

"A Military Classification One."

One! Jesus Christ, you practically had to be a member of the Chiefs of Staff or the President himself. One! Who in the hell was this Brothers?

He had largely skim-read but now he had come to the end of the dossier. He leaned back in his chair and stared at the screen for a time.

Then he said, "I want the Crime Dossier of Charles Brothers."

"What is your classification, please? Are you eligible to read a citizen's Crime Dossier?"

Ballantine Books

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Just back from the World Science Fiction Convention where, as we predicted, RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA won the Hugo. We instantly cabled our congratulations to Arthur C. Clarke at his home in Sri Lanka [new name for Ceylon], and he cabled back, "Splendid news . . . should boost me on final 20,000 stretch just began . . . thanks and love to all!" So a new Clarke novel is on the horizon . . . and we'll tell you more as soon as we see the manuscript.

RAMA first saw print in the United States as a serial in Galaxy, thanks in large part to Clarke's agent Scott Meredith, who was a devoted sf fan long before becoming literary agent for many of the world's top writers. While still an editor at Galaxy, we suggested to Meredith that it was high time Clarke had a novel serialized in one of the magazines, since that was where his first sf was published. Meredith agreed and promised to send the next Clarke novel to Galaxy providing Playboy [the best-paying market in the field], could not take it on. True to his word, Meredith sold RAMA to Galaxy. Then we brought the galleys of the novel with us to Ballantine, and the rest is publishing history. Much has been said and written about agents—and not all of it complimentary. So, let us go on record in appreciation of the unsung middlemen in the field.

• • •

We are celebrating an auspicious anniversary this month with the publication of THE EDEN CYCLE, by Raymond Z. Gallun, whose first [and second, as it happens] story was published exactly 45 years ago. Hardly a new-wave writer, Ray Gallun nonetheless fills his novel with all the literary invention and imagination associated with the best contemporary science fic-

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tion. Here's a world where mere wishing will make it so . . . where anyone can do anything, can be anywhere and can even live forever: "As you choose in all matters, you have ultimate free choice, as long as you do not seriously interfere with the choices of other roving personalities . . ." But, does man really want free will? Will he know how to exercise it? What is the price he must pay? These are some of the philosophical problems Gallun considers in a unique novel that takes places on a farm in the mid West, on a street-corner in Heaven, in a palace of Ancient Egypt, in the environs of Hell and, even, somewhere in Middle Earth.

• • •

When we presented THE BEST OF STANLEY G. WEINBAUM at the sales conference last year, we were greeted with a chorus of "What's a Weinbaum?" Readers knew who Weinbaum was, and lots of books were sold. This year we offer THE BEST OF FRITZ LEIBER, and all the salesmen approved that choice. This second volume in our classic library of definitive sf collections by the giants of the field was a selection of the Science Fiction Book Club. The 22 stories, specially chosen by Leiber himself, are introduced by Poul Anderson. Even at its price of $1.75 [you would not believe what paper costs!], this collection is a super buy. Any serious reader of science fiction will, no doubt, want the entire series.

• • •

Finally a Christmas present for all you fantasy fans—the fourth and final volume of Evangeline Walton's retelling of the Welsh Mabinogion. THE PRINCE OF ANNWN is the new book, and we are reissuing the first three which have been unobtainable for some months. All four books have been beautifully boxed for holiday gift-giving. Look for the set [$6.00] or for the individual titles [THE ISLAND OF THE MIGHTY, THE SONG OF RHIANNON and THE CHILDREN OF LLYR—$1.50 each] wherever paperback books are sold.

He went through that routine again.

And there was the Crime Dossier.

There was precious little that Tad Boleslaw didn't already know, aside from a couple of traffic violations before the war and one drunk and disorderly charge back when the other had been eighteen. He came to the subject's military years. AWOL once for two days. Another minor offense; while going through training he had refused to obey an order of one of his non-coms. Tad didn't bother to read the details.

He then came to another surprise. There was a lot of militarized numbers, references and general gobblydygook—then a stamp: "Information Restricted."

Again he slumped in surprise for a moment, then checked Brothers' post-war Crime Dossier.

Nil except for the three shootings. The first two had been Blacks, as Tad had already known. Same family; they were brothers, Wilbur and Washington Scott, 18 and 20 years respectively. Both with lengthy crime records. The second, Jesus Martinez, a Cuban of 18 years, had no particular record. Schmidt had already told him that. The third shooting, that of last night, was of Jose Gonzales, a Mexican.

And that was the crime career, such as it was, of Charles Brothers.

Tad thought about it awhile and then requested the Crime Dossier

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of Jose Gonzales. Though of Mexican background, he had been born in Arizona. His record was sparse. As a twelve-year old he had been picked up by the juvenile authorities for pilfering candy in an ultramarket. He had been properly scolded and released. He had been picked up again at fifteen for loitering, evidently in the companionship of some less savory Mexican youths. About a year ago he had been arrested while riding in a stolen car. It turned out that he hadn't known it was stolen. The driver, who had given him a ride, had ripped off the vehicle. Jose was turned loose. And that was all, no more crime record.

Tad slumped back again.

The boy that Brothers had shot the night before had, for all practical purposes, no criminal record at all. Tad's probably was worse. Although, now that he thought of it, he had never looked up his own dossier. He probably had a few traffic violations, or some such, to his credit. Oh yes, and that time when he was in college and they had the peace demonstration. He had been arrested along with a score of other students, and released when the Civil Liberties Union hit the fan.

He turned off his screen and thought a while, then turned it back on and asked for the Military Dossier on Charles Brothers.

It would seem that he *had* been a war hero. Besides his Bronze Star, a combat medal not easily acquired, he had several Battle Stars, a few campaign ribbons—but anybody could get those—and three Purple Hearts. In other words, the innocuous appearing Buddy Brothers, as Jim Kelly had called him, had been hit by enemy fire three times.

The last item was what stopped him. It was practically a duplication of the restricted information in the general dossier he had first read. Something had happened. Tad hadn't the slightest clue as to what. A court martial, perhaps? The report didn't even give that.

Charles Brothers was discharged. Period. Honorably? Dishonorably? For being a homosexual? Or what? The information simply wasn't there.

Suddenly, he became irritated with himself. This was a hell of a way to spend one of his days off. He and Jim Kelly worked a full four-day week. Why should he devote his own time to worrying about something that was really none of his concern? Charles Brothers had been exonerated. To hear Norm Schmidt talk, the bemedaled veteran should get another medal for knocking off undesirable juvenile delinquents. Maybe he was right. God knows, there were enough of them these days. What with automation and computerization of industry, it was practically impossible to get a job any more and the streets were overflowing

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with kids, some of whom seemed to feel that they had a mandate to prey on their elders.

He flicked off his screen and came to his feet, yawning. He decided to go downtown to the Mall and see if anything was stirring. He could have called one of his feminine friends but he didn't really feel like it. He was in an unhappy frame of mind.

Instead of summoning an automated cab from the autopool on the third basement level, he went on down to the metro and took the vacuum tube into town. There were too many vehicles around as it was, even though they weren't allowed on street level.

In the Mall he sauntered about. When he had been a youngster, there had been a good many small shops here. But that was yesteryear. With the coming of the ultramarket, the small shop had begun to wither away. You could order anything, but anything, in your own home and have it delivered there into your delivery box by chute almost instantly. Why spend time shopping?

The Mall these days, aside from being a charming area for loafing away on a bench, or strolling about amongst begging pigeons, watching the girls go by, and such, boasted various bars and restaurants, usually highly specialized; Chinese, Italian, French, Mexican. You could, of course, have ordered any of the dishes in the privacy of your own home, but some citizens liked the congenial atmosphere of a well-done restaurant. There were also art galleries, theatres for live shows, nightclubs and various other public establishments purveying items or entertainment not practical for home-use.

He stopped for a few minutes and stared into the window of an art gallery. Evidently, a one-man show was going on inside. He peered down at the name of the artist. Sam Rhinedorf. Tad had never heard of him. His style seemed to be a return to the Impressionists.

There was someone standing next to him.

He looked over and said, "Why; it's Ms. Brothers. Good afternoon."

She blinked her blue eyes through the slightly pink tinted lenses of her glasses. She was petite, he realized now—size eight at a guess. And she looked even nicer than she had the night before, though she wore no cosmetics and her clothes were once again years out of date. Not that Tad Boleslaw was any fanatic about women's styles.

She said, in her small voice, "Why, it's Mr.—"

"Boleslaw," he reminded her, smiling. "My partner and I returned your father's gun last night. Tad Boleslaw."

"Yes, of course," she said, and then looked up and down the street as though seeking some reason for

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departure.

But Tad wasn't having any. There was an elfin something about this girl that attracted him. And there was also a . . . well, he couldn't quite put his finger upon it. A mystery of some sort or other.

He said, "It's one of my days off. I'm killing time. The Hole is just up the street, would you join me?"

"The Hole?"

He laughed. "Sam's Bar. Really, a very nice place. Sam owns the only unautomated bar in town and serves the best dark beer I've ever tasted. He has everything else, too, of course."

"Oh, Father doesn't permit me to drink."

He studied her quizzically for a moment, his head tilted to one side. He guessed her age at twenty-five or so.

He said, "For that matter, Sam carries soft drinks. You could have a Del Valle or something while I had my beer, and we could find out a little about each other."

"What did you want to find out about me, Mr. Boleslaw?" she asked, her voice wavering just a bit.

He stared at her. "Why, nothing. I meant, I just thought we could chat a little."

"I'm afraid my father wouldn't approve of my entering a place where they served hard drink."

He was exasperated and said, "Well, then, we'll go somewhere where they serve only soft drinks and we'll *both* have a Del Valle."

She said, and was there a distant regret there? "I don't think my father would approve of me associating with a man to whom I haven't been properly introduced. Forgive me—and thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Boleslaw." She turned and hurried away.

He gazed after her. Her long brown hair bounced charmingly on her shoulders and the very faint sway of her buttocks gave promise of a fascinating figure underneath those antiquated clothes.

"Properly introduced, for Christ's sake?" he muttered. "I was introduced to you last night, in your own home by your own father. How proper can an introduction get?"

In disgust, though why he should be bothered he couldn't say, he went on up the way to The Hole and took a stool at the bar. He liked the place. It was his favorite bar. Sam had made every effort to recreate the atmosphere that prevailed a century ago, before the first of the World Wars. It was pleasantly dim, pleasantly cool though without the artificial cold of air conditioning.

Sam came down and without a word drew a dark beer.

Tad said, "Sam, how old do you figure a girl should be before she's allowed to drink, enter bars and associate with any men she damn well pleases? And, come to think of it, choose her own clothes and her own hair-do and wear make-up if she wants to?"

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Sam slid the stein over. He was a stereotype bartender of the old school, beefy, with large reddish hands, and came complete with white apron.

He said, "Why, I don't know, Mr. Boleslaw. About eighteen?"

"Would you believe twenty-five?"

Sam obviously didn't know what he was talking about.

LIFE was routine. Each patrol was about the same. An indecent exposure complaint over in Madison Park; an attempted rape of a fourteen-year old; an occasional mugging; a salesman reporting his hotel room cleaned out, samples and all. One night they picked up a child of eighteen months and rushed it to the hospital; it had been beaten unconscious by a drunken father. They picked up a pervert in Jefferson Park who was molesting boys, or trying to. He was an old customer. Jim called him "sweetie."

It was two weeks later that Jim Kelly told him idly, as they were about to take off for the night's patrol, "Did you hear? Brothers did it again."

Tad looked over at his partner, not getting it at first. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Jim snorted and said, "Buddy Brothers. He was jumped again. Two of them this time. Chilled them both. I tell you, that man's a one man vigilante group."

Tad stared at him. "You have to be drivel-happy. When? Why weren't we called in?"

"Didn't happen in our patrol area. Just outside it. Mike and Luke were first on the scene. Couple of wop kids. One had a gun, the other a knife."

"That makes six," Tad muttered. "How can a man in a well policed, civilized town have to kill six kids—were they kids?"

"Yeah," Jim said. "One about sixteen, one eighteen. Good riddance."

Tad sucked in breath. "At the rate he's going, he'll finish off every juvenile delinquent in town—if they are juvenile delinquents."

Jim looked at him from the side of his eyes. He said harshly, "What are you talking about? They tried to stick him up."

Tad said emptily, "The first two he killed had criminal records. The second two didn't."

Jim was disgusted. "They were just beating the rap. They hadn't taken a fall yet for any of their romps. They were both armed, weren't they?"

Tad didn't answer directly. He said, his voice musing, "I wonder how much of a Crime Dossier these latest two had."

He stewed about it. When the patrol was over he decided to go and see Norm Schmidt, but the lieutenant was out on an attempted armed robbery romp.

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He went on home and to bed and stewed some more. After a couple of hours, he got up and went over to his desk and activated his screen. It took him fifteen minutes to get the information he was seeking from the National Data Banks. Buddy Brothers had had his shoot-out with the two Blacks two years ago. He'd had his second attack, the one with the Puerto Rican kid a year later. And the Mexican boy that Tad and Jim had been in on, came six months after that. This shooting of the two Italians came only two weeks after, give or take a day or two.

"It's accelerating," he growled.

Then something else came to him. The first two were Blacks, the third was a Puerto Rican, the fourth a Mexican, the next two Italians.

What had Brothers said, when Tad had given him his name? "Are you a foreigner?"

A foreigner, for Christ's sake? Wasn't everybody in America a foreigner, except the Indians?

He went back to bed and stewed some more.

He got damn precious little sleep—if any. At best, he drowsed.

When he finally surrendered and got up, he went, still in his pajama tops—he never wore the bottoms—directly to his desk screen. Then he thought better of it and walked on into his bath and used his face depilatory. Then he donned his dress uniform, which was swank

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enough to suggest he had more rank than he actually carried.

He didn't take time for breakfast. He sat down before his screen and began. He wound up with Colonel Mathers, of the Local National Guard.

He identified himself and said, "Colonel Mathers, I'm checking up on some matters pertaining to Charles Brothers." He read off the identification number. It evidently wasn't necessary. The colonel recognized the name.

"What can I do for you?"

"Some years ago, Mr. Brothers attempted to join the National Guard. With his background, isn't such a man usually offered at least a lieutenant's commission?"

"Yes."

"But he was rejected."

"Yes."

"But, why?"

"That information is restricted."

"I am a police officer, Colonel."

"So you have already informed me." The screen blanked.

"Wow," Tad said. He slumped in his chair. It came to him that he was continually slumping every time he came up against the Buddy Brothers matter.

He thought about it.

Was there any use attempting to get in touch with the Octagon, in Greater Washington?

He doubted it.

And he began to have some other doubts. He suspected that if he prowled about much more that sooner or later somebody was going to land on him and shut him up. He could be shut up easily—if he didn't want to lose his job. And only a small percentage of the population had jobs any more, what with computerization and automation. Automation, hell, ultra-mation they were calling it these days. You didn't need *people* any more on the job. Most people lived on their minimal Guaranteed Annual Income. So far as Tadeusz Boleslaw was concerned, the hell with that.

However, he was a cop, and a dedicated cop.

It was late in the day by the standards of the average man, but early for him. However, he got up and went over to his mini-sized autobar and dialed himself a Polish Zubrowka vodka. The world might think that Russian vodka was the best, but any Pole knew better. This came with a sprig of herb in it that gave it a special flavor. Buffalo brand, it would be translated into English. Bison brand was more accurate and there was a Bison on the label of the bottle.

He took it back with him to the desk screen and stared a long time, without activating it. Then he knocked the drink back and got to his dialing again.

From the National Data Banks he checked back on the military career of Charles Brothers. His division, his regiment, finally down

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to his company and then squad.

He winced when he went over the record of Brothers' company. Over the four years that Buddy Brothers had been with them, they had taken something like two hundred percent casualties. Two hundred percent! How had Brothers lived through four years with no more than three wounds? At the end of four years, there must not have been a dozen men who had gone through the whole thing, as Buddy Brothers had done. Four years of taking casualties. A death here, a minor hit there, a wound the other place that took you out of combat for all time—and probably you blessed the fate that did it.

But two hundred percent casualties! There just wasn't such a thing in military statistics for that short a period. That meant *nobody* was left alive, twice over. And over and over the new replacement kids coming in, most of them, green as they were, going down the first week or so. The veterans, such as Buddy Brothers, after a year or so in combat had at least some chance of surviving. At least they knew all the ropes.

Two hundred percent casualties! In four years? They must have used that regiment as shock troops, expendables.

His efforts became routine now. And it took him two hours to find what he wanted, a veteran of Charles Brothers' own outfit who lived in Center City. Had he failed, he would have picked the nearest other big city and started off all over again. But he found what he was looking for. John Cardin, once a corporal in Brothers' company.

Tad noted down the man's address; it was out in one of the suburbs. He got his cap and headed for the car pool where he rented a Volkshover.

The Cardin home was a single family house, middle class, neat and with a few children's toys on the lawn.

The identity screen on the door picked him up and shortly the door opened and a middle-aged woman in an apron was there. She was a placid looking type, obviously busy at her housework and surprised to have a police officer confronting her.

She said, "Good heavens, what is it? Nothing's happened to—?"

He held up a hand and smiled. "Nothing has happened to anyone, Mrs. Cardin. I simply have a few questions to ask your husband."

"What has he done?" she said in alarm.

He held his smile, trying to make it reassuring. "He hasn't done anything. It's not about him. It's about someone he used to know."

She was relieved. "Oh, well, John isn't here now, but he should be home from work at any time."

"Could I wait?"

"Why, certainly."

She led him to the small living room and saw him seated.

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"Could I get you a drink? John usually has a bottle of something or other in the kitchen cabinet."

"Thanks, no. Not while in uniform."

She left him and he waited for possibly fifteen minutes until her husband entered.

The man was somewhere in his mid-fifties, which fitted in with the fact that he had served in the Asian War, and his face was wrinkled beyond his years. It wasn't a happy face, no laugh wrinkles, but lots of weariness. He was scowling.

He said in puzzlement, "You wanted to see me? About what?"

Tad stood and held out his hand for a shake, in the way of reassurance, and said, "I'm Patrolman Boleshaw, Mr. Cardin. I wanted to ask you some questions about Charles Brothers."

The other shook hands, still frowning. He said, "Never heard of him."

"It was a long time ago. During the war. Sergeant Charles Brothers. Possibly you knew him as Buddy Brothers."

"Oh, Buddy. Sure. Sit down, Officer. Whatever happened to him?"

"He lives right here in Center City." Tad reseated himself.

"I'll be damned. I never knew that. What did you want to know about Buddy?" Tad's host seated himself as well, and leaned forward in his chair, elbows on the armrests.

Tad said carefully, "It's about that trouble in the Asian War."

"Good God," the other said in disgust, "are they raking that up again?"

"Well, in a way," Tad said carefully.

The other was more than unhappy. He said musingly, "If they're after him, they'd be after me too."

Tad shook his head reassuringly. "Don't worry about it, Mr. Cardin. You were exonerated, weren't you?" He hoped he was asking questions that wouldn't alarm the other.

"Yeah, sure, we all were. The whole thing was hushed up. The orders came right from the top. I don't know why in the hell they're digging it up at this late date. It happened over twenty years ago."

Tad nodded and said, pulling his notebook from his pocket and bringing out a pencil. "Suppose you tell me about it, briefly."

Cardin said, "Well, no reason why not. It's all in the records though. Why do you need it?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you. Orders."

"Okay, then. We were down in the Delta, see, and we'd been taking a lot of hits. One hell of a lot of casualties and we were all uptight. We'd been in the line for three weeks and that Delta was no joke. Anyway, there was this town called Soc Trang. Little dump, couple of hundred people. The lieu-

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tenant, he figured that was where some of the sniper fire was coming from. And we went in. I don't know what happened. Something just kind of snapped."

He paused and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, obviously distressed at the memory.

"Go on," Tad said soothingly.

"Well, Buddy Brothers was kind of the ring leader, you might call it. He always was a fiesty little bastard. We didn't find any snipers or even any military age men at all. We rounded up the women and kids and put 'em all in the school house and then we rounded up the men, they were all old, and wasted them."

Tad looked up, trying to avoid gaping at the other. Supposedly, he already knew about the incident. He said, "You shot them all?"

"Yeah. That's what I just said." The other moistened his lips. "We'd gone drivel-happy, see. We were all acting like crazies. I don't know who it was got the idea of burning down the school. Maybe several of us at once."

"I see," Tad said. "I don't believe I've ever heard of Soc Trang."

"Nothing ever came out. The army was having a lot of heat those days about several other—massacres, they called them. And there was a howl going up in the States, the newspapers and all. So the Brass didn't want any more to get out so they put the lid on Soc Trang. The lieutenant and Buddy Brothers and a couple of other guys, they were considered the leaders and they were bounced out of the service with some kind of special discharge handed down all the way from the general."

"I see," Tad said. He returned the notebook to his pocket. "You think this might have had any long term effect on Brothers?"

The other shrugged hugely. "I don't know. I've never seen him again. But you see, he'd been in it for years. I only was in for six months before I took a hit. He got to the point where he liked the killing. Buddy never took no prisoners. He shot 'em. Sometimes, if you had a prisoner he'd take him off aways and waste him, too, even after the officers had told you to pick up a few of them for questioning. He hated gooks, and he called just about anybody a gook that wasn't what he was. He even didn't like the niggers in our own outfit."

"I see," Tad said. He stood and said, "Well, thank you very much, Mr. Cardin. You've been very cooperative. I hate to have brought this all up again for you—after all these years."

The other looked at him, sickness behind his eyes. "Nothing at all."

"And please thank Ms. Cardin for me." Tad headed for the door.

WHEN Tad Boleslaw walked into the office of Norman Schmidt, the lieutenant looked up.

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He said, "Cheers, Tad. What spins? What're you doing in uniform? I thought this was one of your days off."

Tad nodded and sat down. "It is," he said. "But there was something I wanted to check out. Norm, Charles Brothers is a psycho."

"What in the hell are you talking about?" The older man reached for his stubby briar, scowling. He pulled a pound tin of pipe tobacco toward him, flicked the lid off it and began to load up.

Tad said, "I've been talking to a war buddy of his. He said that Brothers saw so much action that he finally liked to kill. He'd shoot prisoners and so forth. Then one day he led his men into one of those civilian massacre things. Killed a whole village of them, burning the kids up in the school house."

Lieutenant Schmidt winced.

Tad held his peace for a time.

The older cop said finally, "That was a long time ago, Tad. More than twenty years. The median age in the United States of the Americas is twenty-five. In short, most people can't even remember back to the Asian War. A lot of us did things that we don't like to think about any more. I was part of a bomber crew in the Asian War. God only knows where some of the bombs we dropped hit. We even layed them on towns that were in the part of the country we were supposedly trying to defend. God only knows how many children the bombs that left my plane killed." He paused, and his face was empty, there was the same sickness that had been in the face of John Cardin. "Probably more than the number that died in that school."

Tad didn't say anything.

The older man spoke up again, finally. "It was a long time ago, Tad."

Tad didn't say anything.

Schmidt had let his pipe go out. He relit it with a match from the old fashioned box of kitchen matches he affected.

He said, "Tad, it was a long time ago. Like I told you, I checked out the Brothers' Crime Dossier. He had nothing at all on him until just two years ago when he ran into those two Black funkers. Those were bad boys, Tad."

Tad Boleslaw nodded. "Evidently they were. And what you say is true. He has nothing on his record since the war, until that. But there are some other angles."

"Such as?" The older man's voice was skeptical.

Tad brought his notebook from his pocket. He said, "I checked out his daughter, Tilly. Just on, sort of, instinct. Two months before he had his shoot-out with those two Negros, she was gang-raped by a half dozen or so street bums. They never caught them. Tilly is just a bit around the corner these days."

The lieutenant, who somehow hadn't been able to get his pipe going again, fixed his eyes upon his

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junior and said, "Okay. Go on."

Tad said doggedly, "Brothers had a nice home out of town aways. He moved into the slums where he lives now. He began to collect guns. He joined the CAP. He tried to get into the National Guard, which turned him down in view of his Asian War thing, I suppose."

"Go on."

"He began to what amounted to prowling the streets—armed. By the way, I suspect he wears bullet-proof clothes."

"Why do you suspect that?"

"It comes back to me. The way he looked that night when Kelly and I picked him up. Sophisticated bullet-proof stuff. The kind the army has. Not hard to come by—surplus army stores and so on."

"Go on."

"He's out looking for trouble, Norm. He finds it. And he has no mercy. So okay, his liking for killing was submerged for twenty years. But then his kid was raped. He's prejudiced. All these supposed muggers and stick-up artists he's killed are either Negros, Latin Americans, or Italians. Jesus, even when I gave him my Polish name the other night he tightened up. He's a psycho, Norm. His wife left him a couple of years ago; she must have been afraid."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

Tad stared at him. "I brought it to you."

The lieutenant put his pipe down into an ashtray overflowing long past.

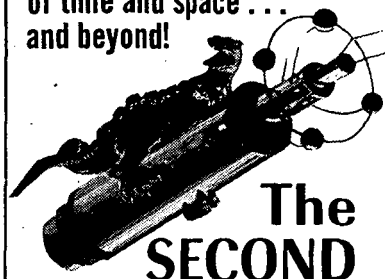
He said, "Forget about it, Tad. We've got nothing on the guy. As far as the military is concerned, his case is long buried. As far as his shooting up young punks who have jumped him, who are we to argue? Better him than some poor innocent citizen who can't defend himself. He *defends* himself with a vengeance."

"I think we ought to look into it."

"Forget about it, Boleslaw. That's an order. I get the feeling that you're pushing a little bit more than is called for. You'll make detective when your time comes."

Tad flushed. He took a deep breath. "Yes, sir," he said. "I'd

To the farthest boundaries of time and space . . . and beyond!



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like to request a leave of absence."

"Oh, you would, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wizard. You're eligible. In fact, I think you're due for a vacation shortly. You could take it now. Just one thing, Patrolman Boleslaw. On your vacation, you do not wear your uniform."

"No, sir."

"And turn in your gun for the period you are away, Patrolman Boleslaw."

TAILING a man is an art, particularly at night in a city of practically deserted streets. However, Tad Boleslaw had taken a special course at the FBI school. The FBI was willing and even anxious to give ambitious local police as much training as they could assimilate, in view of the continuing national crime wave.

Obviously, the subject must not even suspect that he is being tailed. He must not be even vaguely aware of your presence. You walk across the street from him, considerably behind. Sometimes, when on the same side of the street, you walk ahead of him. You never look into his face. If you make that mistake, he might remember it, if only subconsciously, and then be surprised, possibly several blocks later, to see that face again. Unless they have reason to suspect they are being followed, few persons consider it. It isn't part of the usual experience.

It went on for almost two weeks and then there was a seeming change in atmosphere. Tad Boleslaw got the impression that either Brothers had tagged him or that the man had something out of the ordinary in mind.

He wasn't particularly afraid that the other would recognize him. The small man had seen him only in uniform, some weeks ago, and even then only twice and for short periods of time. Besides, Tad had assumed a bit of disguise, had darkened his complexion and put pads of cotton in his cheeks to change the contours of his face. He would have had to be quite close to his quarry to have been recognized.

But this night the other was from time to time looking over his shoulder, seemingly a fraction on the nervous side. Peering, occasionally, right or left.

Brothers varied in the route he took walking home. It was about a two and a half mile hike and there were three different ways he covered it. Tad Boleslaw had already figured out the one he was taking this time, and remained aft of his quarry and, at first, on the opposite side of the street which was even more than usually deserted this night.

Tad got the feeling that this was it. And something, almost ESP, told him that the crisis was just about to be reached.

He crossed back to the other side of the street and entered a doorway, nonchalantly thumping a rolled

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newspaper against his leg. The door was seemingly that to his home. He had noted from the other side that the doorway was open. A delapidated apartment house, typical of this slum neighborhood. He closed the door behind him, all but a crack, and waited.

Had it been rehearsed, it couldn't have come off more cleanly.

He heard a voice, and could recognize it as that of Brothers, say coldly, "Hold it, you funker!"

And another voice, indignantly, "What kind of shit is this? There's no use sticking me up. Do I look like some millionaire?"

And Brothers again. "You damned gook funker. What're you doing on the streets this time of night?" His voice was going high. "Looking for some poor girl to rape, some honest citizen to mug?"

"Who the hell are you? You a cop?"

Tad Boleslaw flicked off the dim light which illuminated the hall behind him and opened the door slightly wider. The two were only a few yards down from him. Impossibly, he had hit it almost on the nailhead.

Brothers was standing there, ineffectual, as usual, in his appearance, but his gyro-jet rocket pistol in hand. The other was a youngster, Puerto Rican, Cuban or Mexican, by the look of him.

"I'm asking the questions," Buddy Brothers said.

The young fellow was indignant. "I'm going home from work. I'm assistant janitor at—"

"You're a liar," the small man sneered.

And then came something Tad Boleslaw hadn't figured upon. Brothers dipped a hand into a side pocket of his jacket and brought forth a second gun. He tossed it to the feet of the other.

He then brought forth from a pants pocket an emergency wrist alarm and flicked its activating stud. Almost immediately, sirens could be heard in the near distance.

His face a mask of hate, the gyro-jet pistol came up.

"That'll be all, Buddy!" Tad called, and stepped from his place of concealment. Originally, he had planned to tackle the smaller man. Or, at least, that's what he had told himself he planned. Schmidt stripping him of both uniform and weapon had left him up in the air. He knew he was being a damn fool trailing this killer without means of taking him.

Charles Brothers swirled, his eyes gawking behind the lenses of his spectacles.

Tad had already pulled the cotton from his cheeks. Now he took off his hat and let it drop to the street, so that the other could recognize him.

The young fellow had shrunk back against the wall, his eyes, too, gaping.

Tad Boleslaw looked at the

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killer. He said, "You cried wolf once too often."

"What are you talking about?" the other snarled, his gun now directed at the patrolman.

"The old fairy story about the kid who was a shepherd. They told him if he ever saw a wolf to sound his horn and yell 'wolf' and they'd come running. But he used to do it just for the Dutch of it—for the excitement. He used to call wolf when there wasn't any wolf. He finally got it in the neck, though somewhat differently than the way you have."

Brothers was staring at him, breathing deeply. The siren swelled in the background.

Tad shook his head and said, "I hadn't figured it. That first shoot-out you had with the two Blacks was legitimate. They really did try to jump you. But then that kill-love came back to you and all these more recent shootings have been set-ups. You'd find some kid, alone in the streets at night, and toss an untraceable gun at his feet, activate your wrist emergency alarm, and then let him have it. The way you let those defenseless people have it in the Asian War. You're around the corner, Brothers. Drop the gun."

The other's eyes were darting every which way. He brought the super-lethal weapon up.

Tad said emptily, "Charles Brothers, would you shoot an officer of the law, pursuing his duty? You too are supposedly an officer of the law, serving our city."

"They were gooks," the other said shrilly. "They're all the same. They're no good. All you can do is kill them, when you find them on the streets, raping girls, sticking up honest—"

Tad said, "Drop the gun, Buddy Brothers."

Instead, the small man, incongruous as a killer with his glasses and his ineffectual mustache, turned and darted for the corner.

He made it just in time to dash in front of the siren screaming patrol car—supposedly coming to his rescue. He shrilled first despair and then agony.

Lieutenant Schmidt issued forth, looked down at the shattered body, then up at Tad Boleslaw.

Tad said, "He was setting this kid up for another killing. He tossed one of those illegal, untraceable guns to the sidewalk in front of him. He was all ready to shoot when I got into the act."

Schmidt looked down at the dead man for a long weary moment. He said finally, "I suppose there's a moral here, somewhere. Wars aren't the best thing in the world to happen. And they don't end—the results of them—when the actual shooting stops."

Tad said, his voice empty. "I'll go over and tell Tilly. She obviously already knew her father was a psycho, poor kid. That's why she was afraid. She knew it was only a matter of time." ✱

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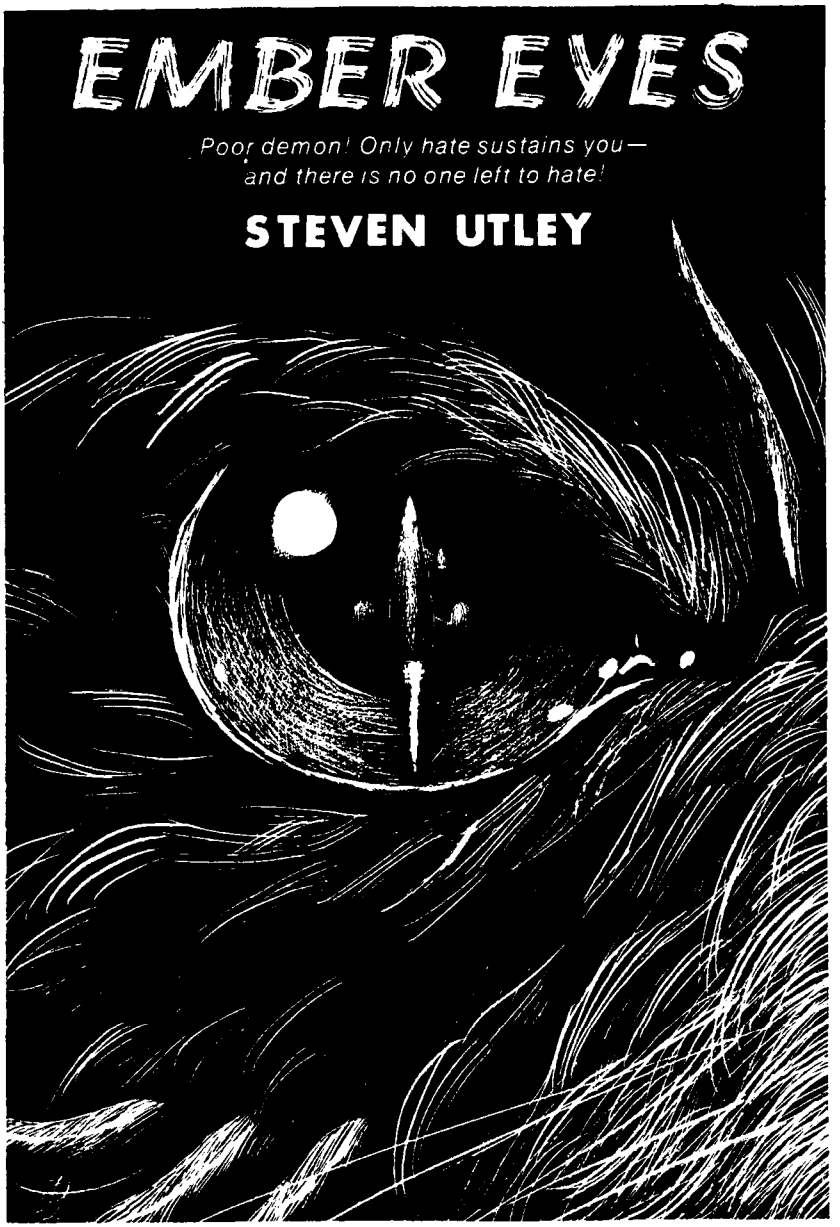
EMBER EYES

Poor demon! Only hate sustains you—
and there is no one left to hate!

STEVEN UTLEY



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THERE was nothing but fire in the air as the first of the ships rose, one, two, three, from their berths. There were roars like blasts of hateful sound blown upward from the depths of pits run by mechanical demons and full of the anguish of unrepentant automobiles. There was Ember-Eyes, coming over the lip of the valley, into fire and noise, shrieking after the departing vessels, "You can't do this!"

Ember-Eyes staggered down the slope, gasping in the hot air. He moved on three feet and used the talon-tipped fingers of his free paw-hand to massage the Mark of the Beast, circuit-printed into the flesh over his heart. The searing agony radiated by the Mark worsened with each step he took toward the launch site on the valley floor. The fire in his chest spread down into his bowels and, hotter than supernovae, cored out his marrow bones. He fell many times. Two more ships had lifted off and escaped him by the time he reached the floor of the valley and came to the launch site's outer fence.

Ember-Eyes hooked his stubby fingers through the metal links and sagged against the barrier. "You can't leave us," he growled hoarsely. "We need you, we need you . . ."

He let go of the fence and slid to his knees in the gravel. Beyond the fence was a narrow, ditch-bordered service road and, beyond that, a second fence, lower than the first. Next came a quarter-mile-wide strip of deep grass and, finally, the great white concrete plain, rolling across the valley floor, past the launch pads, past squat black buildings, to more grass, blacktop and metal links.

He fought down his agony and rose to his hind feet with effort, took a couple of deep, steadying breaths and then clawed his way up the fence. Fifteen feet high, the fence was topped with triple rows of barbed wire, braced at intervals with steel prongs projecting outwards at a forty-five degree angle. Seizing one of the prongs, Ember-Eyes eased himself over the wire and succeeded in avoiding all but a few of the barbs. Crouched atop the fence, shifting on his feet to maintain balance, he was about to leap for the service road when a pencil-thick beam of bluish-white light flashed out of the darkness and sliced through metal links close to his left hind paw. The beam started to track toward him but winked out of existence too soon.

It was enough, however, to startle him. Ember-Eyes fell forward, snarling with panic, and landed in ditch muck with the breath knocked out of him. Writhing with new pain, he thrashed amid the mud and weeds and was vaguely conscious of new fires in the night as another of the ships got away from him.

And his renewed sense of having been betrayed was like a cold, hard

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fist closing around his heart.

They would not come with me, my own children and my children's children would not help me. You hate the human beings too much, *they told me, and I shrieked at them,* Yes! yes! I hate the human beings, I remember the feel of their fire and steel in my flesh and bones, I can still hear their ghost whispers in my head, telling me what was expected of me, telling me what I was in their eyes so that I would hate them all the more intensely for having made a play-thing of me, for having refashioned me in the image of their ancient terrors, that I might prowl in the darkness outside their city of light and afford them excitement, yes, yes, I hate the human beings, yes, and now, now they're bored again, they're going away, they've moved out of their city, they've erected strange machines in the valley, but we won't let them get away, we won't let them discard us—

They would not come with me. My children, my children's children, they all refused to help me. They were born changed, *not rebuilt as I was, they were born changed, and they have been capable of thought all their lives. And they think thoughts that are strange to me.*

I am betrayed on every hand.

THE FIRE and thunder of the vessel's departure died away, and Ember-Eyes lay still in the ditch, listening.

He heard soft, tinny footfalls.

He saw the guard.

The sentry glided out of the darkness on legs that were thin metal rods. Its hemispherical feet made faint clacking sounds as they struck the pavement. Insect-like, its head burned silver when moonlight struck it, then golden as it reflected the flames spouting from the next ship in line to take off. A long, slim traser wand was held at the ready in a curled-up spider of a fist.

Ember-Eyes shifted position in the ditch as he sized up the sentry. Dextrous rather than rugged, the robot had been designed for maintenance work, not fighting. Ember-Eyes grinned toothily and waited until the robot, ignorant of the intruder's flanking movement, drew abreast of him.

Then the creature in the ditch came up out of the mud and shadows with jaws distended and forepaws outstretched. The robot wheeled and jerked the deadly wand around but had no chance to fire. The weapon spun out of the guard's claw as Ember-Eyes struck.

The robot reacted almost at once by clamping a steel-tarantula hand around its attacker's vaguely canine snout. As cartilage in his face began to pop, Ember-Eyes reared and shook his head violently, tearing himself free and sending the sentry skidding on its

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flat buttocks across the blacktop, toward the inner fence.

It was on its feet again immediately, just quickly enough for its leaping black opponent to butt it backward through the air into the shallower ditch on that side of the road. The gleaming cranium grazed the fence, the bulbous metal eyes exploded and, for a few seconds, the sunburst at the perimeter of the launch site rivaled anything in the heavens.

Ember-Eyes did not pause to appreciate the sight. He scooped up the traser wand and, holding it clumsily, pointed it at the inner fence. He had seen the wands used in the city of light, when the human beings had had him that time, and he knew what to expect when he applied pressure to the firing button. But he nonetheless dropped the wand when it flashed away a section of the fence before him. Retrieving the weapon, he fired again and again until he had sliced a wide gap in the electrified barrier. Then, tossing the wand away, he dropped to all fours and plunged into the high grass.

And, out on the white concrete plain, another ship coughed like a Titan clearing his throat and began to rise.

You can't leave us! Ember-Eyes wanted to scream the words, but he had no breath for cries, only for running. The Mark of the Beast, forgotten during the fight with the robot, burned in his body.

The ships rose, one, two, three.

I won't let you leave! I need you! I need you!

The ships rose.

And you need me, you made me, you must still need me, don't you, DON'T YOU?

He stumbled out of the grass and onto the concrete, and he could see human beings moving around the base of the nearest ship, one half-mile away, and he ignored the fire in his flesh, the roar in his ears, and ran. He had covered half the distance to the nearest vessel when he abruptly crumpled and skidded on his face. The pain was too great. He pushed himself up and tried to make his mouth form the words he had heard the human beings use in their city, but only howls came forth. Through the murk of his agony, he saw that the human beings were now entering the ship, the last ship, the very last . . .

Ember-Eyes dragged himself forward half the length of his body and crumpled again.

Then the pain in his body diminished. The Mark of the Beast cooled.

He panted on the concrete and glared at the ship. He felt turned to lead. He had failed.

He saw one of the last human beings turn and wave to him fondly, and he raked his claws on the concrete in an agony of frustration, he snarled his hatred, too weak now to howl, and he watched in horror as the last human beings filed into the

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vessel, watched as the boarding ramp automatically slid away from the base of the ship, as the hatches closed and sealed themselves . . .

Go home, said a spirit voice in his head. *Go home, little wolverine.*

Ember-Eyes tore at his skull, trying to dislodge the voice.

Go home, insisted the voice. *You are not safe here.*

"You can't . . . discard me like this," he muttered. "You took me and remade me, you gave me a purpose, and you gave me the power of thought so that my knowledge of that purpose would make me hate you all the more . . . what can I do, if not hate you and prey upon you? What—"

Go home. And images flooded Ember-Eyes' mind. He saw a fire cloud erupting from the craft on the pad a quarter of a mile away, he saw the concrete blackening and cracking with heat, he saw steel bubbling and running like water, he saw his own hair disappearing in a white flash, saw his flesh crisping, melting away from bones that turned to ash.

He cast a final look of hungry longing at the last of the ships, then turned and began dragging himself back the way he had come.

Fly, urged the voice.

He forced himself to trot as, behind him, the ship rumbled ominously. He trotted faster, feeling adrenalin wash through him, he put his belly close to the ground and ran, felt grass whip his jowls as

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he left the concrete plain, felt his claws tearing up the dirt as he ran—

—felt a wall of heated air sweep him forward, raising his hindquarters and shoving his snout into the sod, singeing his fur, bouncing him unceremoniously for a dozen feet, and noise light noise heat light noise . . .

Blackness.

He could not have been unconscious for longer than seconds because, when he opened his eyes, he was on his back in the grass, kicking at the air, and he could see the ship climbing, slowly at first but gaining speed, growing smaller, and he tried to call after it, call it back down to earth, but there was too little air in his lungs, too little air, and there was no longer a spirit voice in his head, only a roar.

And he had failed.

And he slept.

EMBER-EYES left the launch site shortly before the moon set. He passed several more of the light robots on his way out, but they lay still, did not dispute his passage. Nor did current flow through the inner fence. The robots and the electrified fence, like the Mark of the Beast, like Ember-Eyes himself, had served their purpose. No longer needed, they had been shut off. Ember-Eyes envied them and hated himself for doing so.

He spent the day resting on the lip of the valley. His face ached, his lungs burned whenever he tried to breathe deeply, and large patches of fur had been singed away, revealing pinkish blisters on the skin.

When night fell, he made his slow, painful way back to his territory to the south of the city of light. He sat down beneath a tree on a hill overlooking the city and waited and, by and by, Stripe, his favorite son, crept out of the darkness to sit beside him.

"You look a little the worse for wear," Stripe said in a respectful tone.

Ember-Eyes glared at him for a moment, then fastened his gaze on the blindingly bright city below the hill. "I failed, Stripe."

Stripe contemplated the ground between his forepaws. "We knew that you would," he said quietly. "We told you that you would. Are you hungry, Father? I killed a deer this morning. The carcass is buried not far from here."

"I wish I could make you understand, Stripe. I failed. I *failed.* I went after the human beings to show them that I refused to be a mere play-thing, that I could still exert a little control over my own destiny. That they could not simply cast me aside when they were through with me. That . . ." He shook his head miserably.

"What happened, Father?"

"They . . . they humiliated me again, Stripe. They made me the terror of their nights and then, down in the valley, they made me

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feel terror. One of them spoke to me and told me to run away from the ship before it took off. And I ran away. From start to finish, Stripe, they had things their way."

"Let them go, Father. You can live your own life now."

"They were my life. They thrust me into the night and let me give them the pleasure of fear, of being hated and stalked."

Stripe rose and stretched. "They tired of it, Father. They grew up, and something in their flesh, something irresistable, told them that the moment had come for them to leave."

"To what purpose, Stripe?"

"To whatever purpose, Father. They grew up. We're growing up, too. There will be better things for us to do in days to come than—"

"Go away, Stripe. You confuse me."

Stripe said nothing for a long moment. Then: "I'm sorry, Father. Do you want to eat the deer?"

"No. Leave me alone, Stripe. Go away."

"We could go down into the city and—"

Ember-Eyes snarled and lunged, but Stripe dodged and skipped away from his father's fangs. They eyed each other tensely. "I won't go down into the city," Ember-Eyes growled savagely.

"The Mark of the Beast can no longer hurt us," Stripe said, "and there are things there that—"

"Go away, Stripe!"

"I'm sorry," Stripe muttered sadly. "Goodbye, Father."

EMBER-EYES watched his favorite son turn and lope away in the direction of the city of light, and he somehow knew that not much time would pass before Stripe and the rest of his progeny no longer remembered the nights spent lurking just beyond the lighted perimeter of the city, that they would no longer speak of how the men and women who ventured forth sometimes died squealing with delight and of how that delight had served to make the lurkers hate all the more intensely. They would think thoughts increasingly strange to Ember-Eyes.

Down the hill, Stripe paused and looked back over his shoulder. "We're growing up," he said, a low, soft sound, and was gone.

Ember-Eyes gazed at the city for a long time before limping away into the evening. And his renewed sense of having been betrayed was like a cold, hard fist closing around his heart. He had been remade, he had been told what was expected of him and had been apprised to the fullest extent of his capabilities. He had been made a creature of the night, a deliberately intended monster, and there was no place for him in the city of light. He had been cheated from the start.

There was no more growing up in store for him. ★

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FORUM

ESCAPE ROUTES

This paper is an amalgamation and summation of several talks I have given during the past year to various groups of teachers of sf, in Oregon, at the California Association of Teachers of English, and in Milwaukee. Parts of the talks were directed toward specific problems and techniques of teaching sf, and I have omitted these. But, if I have been creeping around behind science fiction's back talking about it to academics, science fiction has a right to know what I've been saying. So I tried to put the drift and gist of it into this paper.

URSULA K. LE GUIN

At the 1974 meeting of the Science Fiction Research Association, an annual event which I like to call The Bride of Frankenstein in the Grove of Academe, Alexei and Cory Panshin held forth eloquently against the teaching of science fiction in schools and colleges. It seemed a bit quixotic, since their audience consisted of teachers of science fiction, people so interested in and committed to the subject that they had come from all over the country to talk about it and learn how to do it better; since thousands of high schools give science fiction courses now, and the stuffiest college English departments are stooping to conquer. I don't think there's really much question, now, of keeping the professors off Aldebaran. They're there. And that face looking out of the fifth story window of the Ivory Tower, that's the Little Green Man. For myself, I accept this miscegenation happily, and am simply interested in what the offspring may be.

For undoubtedly the recent great increase in the teaching of sf is going to affect the writing of sf. Our audience has widened immensely; and for the first time, we in the sf ghetto are beginning to get criticism—not brush-offs from literary snobs, and not blasts of praise and condemnation from jealous, loyal, in-group devotees, but real criticism, by trained, intelligent people who have read widely both inside and outside the field. This could be the best thing that ever happened to sf, the confirmation of it, both to its readers and to its writers, as a powerful and

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responsible art form.

A ghetto is a comfortable, reassuring place to live, but it is also a crippling place to live. The essence of a ghetto, after all, is that you are *forced* to live there. To choose the ghetto when one is free to choose the greater community is an act of cowardice. Now that the walls are breaking down, I think it behooves us to step across the rubble and face the city outside. We need not lose our solidarity in doing so. Solidarity, loyalty, is not a prison, where you can't choose: it is a choice freely made. But equally we shouldn't expect to be welcomed with songs of praise by all the strangers out there. Why should we be? We're strangers to them, too. If we have weaknesses we must learn to take criticism of them; if we have strengths we must prove them.

One way we can show our strength is by helping the serious critics of sf to set up a critical apparatus, a set of standards, suited to the study and teaching of sf. Some of the criteria by which the conventional novel is discussed and judged apply to sf, and some don't. Teachers can't switch from A TALE OF TWO CITIES to THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE without changing gears; if they do, one book or the other is going to be misinterpreted, mistreated. Fortunately, in two areas at least, sf has established its own standards, and has been applying them with increasing severity, in writing, in teaching writing, and in teaching sf as literature.

The first of these is the criterion of intellectual coherence and scientific plausibility.

The basic canon of fantasy, of course, is: you get to make up the rules, but then you've got to follow them. Science fiction refines upon this: you get to make up the rules, but within limits. A science fiction story must not flout the evidence of science, must not, as Chip Delany puts it, deny what is known to be known. Or if it does, the writer must know it, and defend the liberty taken, either with a genuine hypothesis or with a sound, convincing fake. If I give my spaceships FTL speed, I must be aware that I'm contradicting Albert Einstein, and accept the consequences—all the consequences. In this, precisely, lies the unique aesthetic delight of sf, in the intense, coherent following-through of the implications of an idea, whether it's a bit of far-out technology, or a theory in quantum mechanics, or a satirical projection of current social trends, or a whole world created by extrapolating from biology and ethnology. When such an idea is consistently worked out in material, intellectual, social, psychological, and moral terms, something solid has been done, something real: a thing which can be read, taught, and judged squarely on its own terms. The "sense of wonder" isn't a feeble

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perfume, it's built right into a good story, and the closer you look the stronger the sense of wonder.

A second criticism is that of stylistic competence.

You know what sf was like in the Golden Age of Science Fiction. You know. It was like this. "Oh, Professor Higgins," cooed the slender, vivacious Laura, "but do tell me how does the antipastomatter denudifier work?" Then Professor Higgins, with a kindly, absent-minded smile, explains how it works for about six pages, garble garble garble. Then the Starship Captain steps in, with a tight, twisted smile on his lean, bronzed face. His steely grey eyes glint. He lights a cigarette and inhales deeply. "Oh, Captain Tommy," Laura inquires with a vivacious toss of her head, "is there anything wrong?"—"Don't worry your pretty little head about it," the Captain replies, inhaling deeply. "A fleet of nine thousand Gloobian Slime Monsters off the port side, that's all." And so on. You know. American sf used to be a pulp medium, popcult, all that. Now it isn't—not all of it, anyhow. It has rejoined the sf of England and Europe, which was sparse, but which never was schlock except when it imitated us, and which was always part of the major tradition of fiction. And therefore it is to be judged, not as schlock, not as junk, but as fiction.

What I'm saying is neither self-evident, nor popular. Within the sf ghetto, many people don't want their books, or their favorite writers' books, judged as literature. They want junk, and they bitterly resent aesthetic judgment of it. And outside the ghetto, there are critics who like to stand above sf, looking down upon it, and therefore want it to be junky, popcult, contemptible. There was a strong vein of this in Gerald Jonas' otherwise perceptive *New Yorker* article, and it's one of the many games Leslie Fiedler plays. Fortunately it's a game that our best sf critic, Darko Suvin, never plays. I consider it a real cop-out, an arrogance towards both the books and their readers.

THERE is an area where sf has most often failed to judge itself, and where it has been most harshly judged by its nonpartisans. It is an area where we badly need intelligent criticism and discussion. The oldest argument against sf is both the shallowest and the profoundest: the assertion that sf, like all fantasy, is escapist.

This statement is shallow when made by the shallow. When an insurance broker tells you that sf doesn't deal with the Real World, when a chemistry freshman informs you that Science has disproved Myth, when a censor suppresses a book because it doesn't fit the canons of Socialist Realism, and so forth, that's not criticism; it's bigotry. If it's worth answering, the

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best answer was given by Tolkien, author, critic, and scholar. Yes, he said, fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape? The money-lenders, the knownothings, the authoritarians have us all in prison; if we value the freedom of the mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as possible.

But people who are not fools or bigots, people who love both art and liberty, critics as responsible as Edmund Wilson, reject science fiction flatly as a genre simply not worth discussing. Why? What makes them so sure?

The question, after all, must be asked: From what is one escaping, and to what?

Evidently, if we're escaping a world that consists of *Newsweek, Pravda,* and the Stock Market Report, and asserting the existence of a primary, vivid world, an intenser reality where joy, tragedy, and morality exist, then we're doing a good thing, and Tolkien is right. But what if we're doing just the opposite? What if we're escaping from a complex, uncertain, frightening world of death and taxes into a nice simply cozy place where heroes don't have to pay taxes, where death happens only to villains, where Science, plus Free Enterprise, plus the Galactic Fleet in black and silver uniforms, can solve all problems, where human suffering is something that can be *cured*—like scurvy? This is no escape from the phony. This is an escape into the phony. This doesn't take us in the direction of the great myths and legends, which is always toward an intensification of the mystery of the real. This takes us the other way, toward a rejection of reality, in fact toward madness: infantile regression, or paranoid delusion, or schizoid insulation. The movement is retrograde, autistic. We have escaped by locking ourselves in jail.

And inside the padded cell the people sit and say, Gee wow have you read the latest Belch the Barbarian story? It's the greatest.

They don't care if anybody outside is listening. They don't want to know that there is an outside.

Because the most famous works of sf are socially and ethically speculative, the field has got a reputation for being inherently "relevant." Accused of escapism, it defends itself by pointing to Wells, Orwell, Huxley, Capek, Stapledon, Zamyatin. But that won't wash: not for us. Not one of those writers was an American. My feeling is that American sf, while riding on the reputation of great European works, still clings to the pulp tradition of escapism.

That's overstated, and perhaps unfair. Recent American sf has been full of stories tackling totalitarianism, nationalism, over-

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population, pollution, prejudice, racism, sexism, militarism, and so on: all the "relevant" problems. AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS was a regular textbook in Problems (and my story was one of the chapters). But what worries me is that so many of these stories and books have been written in a savagely self-righteous tone, a tone that implies that there's an answer, a simple answer, and why can't all you damn fools out there see it? Well, I call this escapism: a sensationalist raising of a real question, followed by a quick evasion of the weight and pain and complexity involved in really, experientially, trying to understand and cope with that question. And by the way, I'm not talking only about the reactionary, easy-answer schools of sf, the technocrats, scientologists, "libertarians," and so on, but also about the chic nihilism affected by many talented American and English writers of my generation. Annihilation is the easiest answer of all. You just close all the doors.

IF SCIENCE fiction has a major gift to offer literature, I think it is just this: the capacity to face an open universe. Physically open, psychically open. No doors shut.

What science, from physics and astronomy to history and psychology, has given us, is the open universe: a cosmos that is not a simple, fixed hierarchy, but an immensely complex process in time. All the doors stand open, from the prehuman past through the incredible present to the terrible and hopeful future. All connections are possible. All alternatives are thinkable. It is not a comfortable, reassuring place. It's a very large house, a very drafty house. But it's the house we live in.

And science fiction seems to be the modern literary art which is capable of living in that huge and drafty house, and feeling at home there, and playing games up and down the stairs, from basement to attic.

I think that's why kids like sf, and demand to be taught it, to study it, to take it seriously. They feel this potential it has for playing games with and making sense and beauty out of our fearfully enlarged world of knowledge and perception. And that's why it gripes me when I see sf failing to do so, falling back on silly, simplistic reassurances, or whining Woe, woe, repent, or taking refuge in mere wishful thinking.

So I welcome the study and teaching of sf—so long as the teachers will criticise us, demandingly, responsibly, and make the students read us demandingly, responsibly. If sf is treated, not as junk, not as escapism, but as an intellectually, aesthetically, and ethically responsible art, a great form, it will become so: it will fulfill its promise. The door to the future will be open. ★

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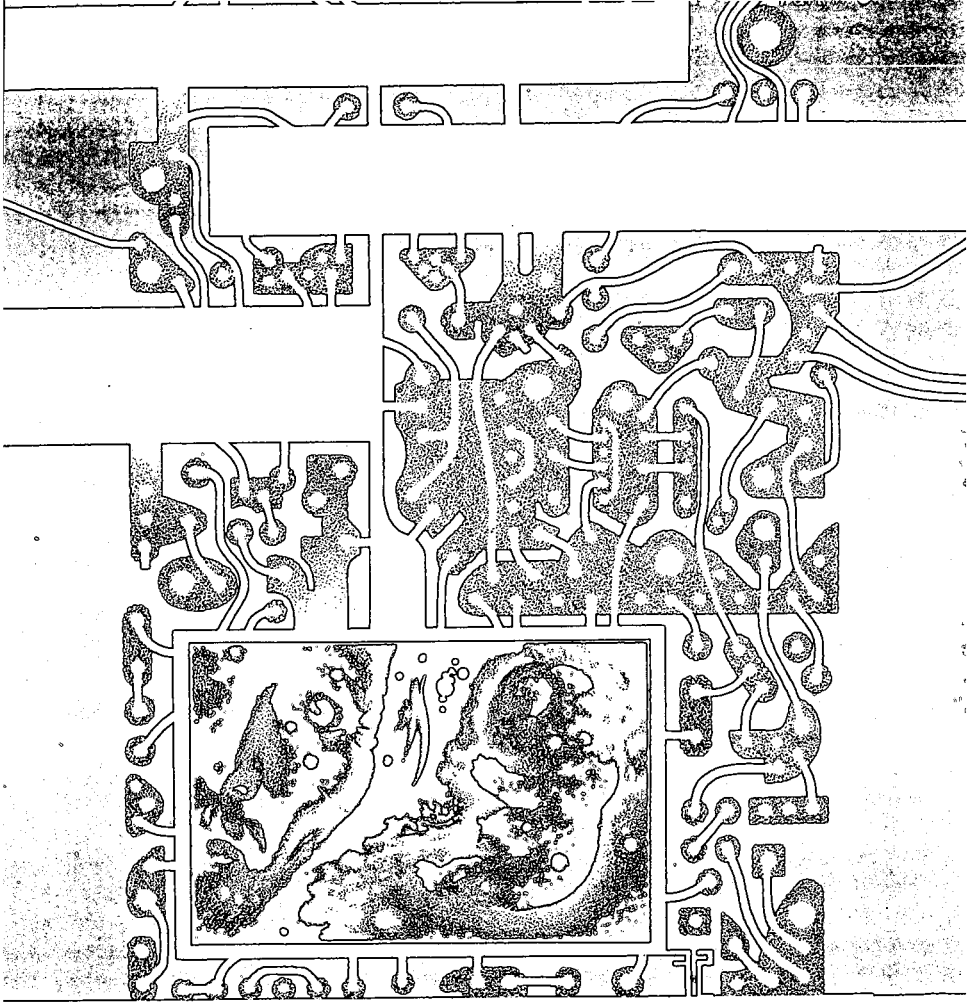

LOVE CONQUERS ALL

FRED SABERHAGEN

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By the mid-21st century the revolution in sexual morals had advanced to the point where chastity, and the repression or sublimation of sexual impulses were considered social offenses, if not actual crimes—but were still sought by many as secret pleasures. Most members of the Establishment belonged to the Church of Eros. Concurrently, crowding and hunger in the world had led to severe restrictions on reproduction even among the wealthy. A woman who had borne two children was required by law to have any subsequent pregnancies aborted.

ART RODNEY, *California electronics engineer and chessmaster, finds that his wife,* RITA, *has fled to Chicago to locate a midwifer and bear a third child rather than have the abortion required by law. Art pursues Rita to convince her that her plan is both wrong and dangerous before it is too late.*

Art's transcontinental tube train is halted at the Mississippi. Under attack there by rioters is a monastery of Christians (a sect long in decline) where experiments on preserving life in freshly aborted fetuses are thought to be under way. Art helps a distraught girl named ROSAMOND JAMISON *get on the train for Chicago.*

In Chicago, Rita's brother GEORGE PARR, *a karate master, and his wife,* ANN, *live like many random violence of the age. Art arrives to find that Rita has come and gone, leaving the two Rodney children with Ann, a militant free-birth advocate and Christian. Art and Ann futilely argue the right and wrong of compulsory abortion in an overcrowded world.*

FRED LOHMANN, *Ann's brother, awakens with his assigned roommate* MARJORIE, *in a Chicago Y (Young Persons' Play Club), a strait-laced place where nightly sex activity is required of all. Fred is a karate student on his way to becoming an ape, the current term for one who roams the streets inflicting apparently pointless violence on strangers.*

MR. HALL, *representing the Bureau of Family Planning, visits Art and is soon convinced that Art himself is innocent of conspiring toward an illegal birth. Hall brings him up to date: the very latest medical technology allows a just-removed fetus to be quick-frozen and later placed in an artificial womb where it will develop into a normal baby. (Some doctors are preserving fetuses on moral grounds, while others are performing these illegal operations for the money.)*

Art convinces the Parrs that he must be allowed to talk to Rita, face to face. George takes him on a tour of the city, supposedly to arrange the contact but really to confuse any Family Planning agents

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who might be watching them. High points on the tour are a stadium where the unemployed are paid to watch baseball, and rioting threatens when the home team loses; and a slumburb tavern where Art hears a disheartening broadcast of world news.

George takes Art to his karate dojo where Fred, who wants George to hire him as an instructor, has come to be evaluated. Fred fails in combat against humanoid karate-machines. One of George's students, Dr. Hammad, is introduced to Art as the man who can arrange his meeting with Rita.

"I happened to see your wife this morning," the doctor was telling Art a few minutes later. "She's in good health and good spirits." The doctor was hanging his street clothes in a locker, getting ready for his private karate lesson. George was out in the main room of the dojo, discussing some refinement of mayhem with the bodyguard Ivor. From where Art stood in the locker room he could see Fred sitting out there too, the picture of defeat, head resting in his hands, blood drying brownish on his white jacket. His brown belt had come unknotted.

"Where is she?" Art asked.

"Understand, I have no direct connection with the place she's staying at. It's been my experience, though, that they do a good job of taking care of guests."

"You have no connection? Aren't you the one who's intending to—?"

"Oh, no, no, I'm not handling your wife's case myself. No, the connection between me and George is too obvious, you see. In such cases a referral to another physician is more prudent."

"Who is he, then? When am I going to see her? When is the operation to be?"

"It'll be soon, I suppose. She's young and healthy, and I would anticipate an uneventful parturition and freezing."

The casual words brought on an icy congealing in Art's own bone marrow. He had no clear idea of what a three-months' fetus actually looked like, but in his mind he saw a mindless finger of tissue, extracted like an appendix and then frozen into an icicle.

He asked: "If a fetus is treated this way, then grown in one of those artificial wombs—what are its chances of becoming a normal child?"

"Oh, very good. Excellent. Is that what's worrying you? Don't let it. Freezing an organism that small and then revivifying it is nothing, these days. And an artificial womb actually offers several advantages over a full-term pregnancy and birth. Development of the fetus can be watched day by day and the flow of nutrients perfectly controlled. It's much more physically convenient for the mother, too, of

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course. I expect the FDA will release the wombs for unrestricted use with legitimate children soon; they're probably only delaying because more women would want kids if pregnancy wasn't such a bother." Dr. Hammad pulled on his loose white karate trousers; he smiled reassuringly, as if he had just solved all Art's problems for him.

"That's all very well, doctor. That helps to ease my mind of one kind of worry. But now what about my wife?"

"Oh, this is safer for her than a normal birth would be. I understand she's had two of those."

"I mean legally. Suppose she's caught and convicted and sent to jail and sterilized against her will? What's all that going to do to her?"

"See here," said Hammad sharply, "I thought you wanted this child. There are always certain risks involved, for everyone."

"I don't want this frozen so-called child, Rita does. I want to talk to her, to reason with her, before it's too late."

The doctor had turned his face away and was adjusting his jacket, slowly and meticulously. "You'll have to see someone else about it, then, Mr. Rodney. I told you I'm not operating."

"I insist that I be allowed to see my wife, face to face!" Art was keeping his voice low, but he felt it becoming shaky with his anger. "Now you know where she can be found. And I'm quite ready to stir up trouble, if you refuse to help me talk to her!"

Knotting a green belt at his waist, the doctor glared at Art as if he had found the wrong specimen laid out on a dissecting table. Art glared right back.

"All right," the doctor said at last. "I'll find out if some arrangement can be made for her to phone you. Though it's not wise, phones can be tapped. Where are you staying?"

"No. I want to be able to talk with her in person. Alone."

Hammad was ready now, but he did not go out. "All right, all right. It's against my judgment but since you insist on taking the risk I'll see if there's any way a meeting can be arranged."

"Soon. Very soon."

"All right. Where can you be reached by phone?"

FRED Lohmann stood inside the Megiddo Bar & Coffee House, on the edge of a mean little urban BI district near State Street, not far from the Y where he was rooming. He was alone in a crowd. On a low dais some people with medieval musical instruments were twanging out a ballad about pure-hearted love, and a chill silence had crept into the huge dim room. The place was befogged with the exhaled smoke of several kinds of leaves and synthetic mixtures, tobacco being only one. At every table there were glassy staring eyes, and few of

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them seemed to be aimed at anybody else.

Fred slouched his tall frame over the coffeebar, nursing what they called a small Turkish, which had coffee and other things mixed in it, along with a vague dull hope that someone might ask him about the little bandage on the side of his head. After all, mighty few men could have handled those andys at the speed they were set for today. Not one in a hundred, probably, even given the chance to train, could do it. Black belt George, of course. Third degree black belt, no less. He probably set them on speed One and knocked them down like bowling pins. Toward George, Fred felt envy, but there was no malice in it.

Karate was a good business to be in. You could get to meet some influential people, people with class, like the Dr. Hammad who had come in and patched Fred's scalp today. Afterward Fred had watched the doctor go through his private lesson, and George had used Fred to demonstrate a point or two, and had Fred spar freestyle with the doctor a little bit, taking it easy.

Now Fred made a karate blade of his hand and chopped delicately, silently, at the edge of the bar. Then he stopped. Who cared? What was the use? George probably could tell without even checking that he had been lying about having a brown belt. Sorry, George had said, no job now. Practice every day and we'll see. George hadn't said every day for how long, but Fred knew it wouldn't be for just a week or two. Months or maybe even a year before he got his stance and his control and everything else up to the standards George wanted in a brown or black belt, in a paid instructor. There was not much fun in grunting and sweating and working like a machine for that length of time. And there was no guarantee that he would ever make it, so what was the sense in putting out that kind of effort?

Up to the bar beside Fred there stepped a young man who looked like one who knew his way around. He was of average height, but so broad-shouldered that he appeared squat. Around his shoulders he wore the pelt, doubtless artificial, of what Fred supposed was a wolf; anyway it was a shaggy animal, with pointy little stick-up ears, beady glittering glass eyes, and sharp-looking sizable white teeth in a pink open plastic mouth.

Fred hadn't yet made contact with anyone who knew where he might buy some gladrags. "Hey," he called quietly.

The wolf-man turned, properly casual, and looked Fred over. "Hey," he answered coolly. "You buyin'?"

Fred waited long enough to show that he wasn't being pushed into anything. "Got my check today, why not?"

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Fred and Wolf ("Call me Wolf, man.") sat at a table, where they were soon joined by a friend of Wolf's called Lewandowski, who was drinking herb tea spiked with vodka. Fred bought another round for the three of them and decided it was the last he was going to buy. He sounded out Wolf and Lewandowski about gladrags, and they assured him that a man who sold such things would be around later.

Wolf said he came from New York city. He let it be known that he had led a gang there and the New York police were looking for him so he had come west for his health. Fred could believe this about halfway. Lewandowski, a fat, strong-looking youth with empty eyes, was a native Chicagoan. Once he started talking it was hard to get him to shut up. He said he was looking for a job with one of the policy wheels, legal or illegal made no difference to him; his old man was a compulsive gambler and he knew there was no money to be made on the sucker's side of the operation.

Neither of them asked Fred about his bandage, but he faked a little more headache than he actually felt and managed to reveal casually that he was a karate expert, working hard for his black belt. He saw the others hardening their faces slightly to keep from showing that they were impressed. Probably they believed him about halfway as he did them. Well, he was telling them about half the truth. If only there was someone he could talk to.

Finally Fred gave up waiting and bought yet another round, for neither of the other two seemed to have any money. They both said they had been on BI for about a year, since abandoning school. And Wolf said he couldn't even collect his checks these days or the New York police would find out where he was and have him extradited.

Fred began to feel a little drunk and sick, and his wounded head ached in earnest. The gladrag man finally arrived and was pointed out to him, and as soon as he had the little carton in his pocket Fred went back to the Y. Marjorie wasn't in, or else she wouldn't answer his tapping at her door. Without her unlatching her side of the bed, he couldn't even let his down, and so was restricted to slouching on his spine in a chair with his feet up on his tiny table. He sat there in dizzy silence for a while, staring into the hot eyes of the Y's founder, whose portrait decorated one wall. On another wall was the predictable print of *Love Conquers All,* the naked urchin wearing fake wings and pretending to be Eros, climbing out of bed and knocking down books and mathematical instruments and trampling a violin. That Garavaggio had certainly known how to paint. That picture would be something to try to carve in wood.

He wanted Marjorie to come

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back, and to hurry up about it. But maybe she had checked out, and tonight he would have to sleep with some real old-fashioned sex kitten, some real dog who studied an erotic manual every day. He didn't know if he could take that now.

One thing he sure wasn't going to be able to take for very long tonight was sitting here alone. It was only about eight o'clock, not yet dark outside, and he was neither sober nor yet really high on the spiked coffee. He got up and went out, and had nowhere to go. In a little while he was heading back to the Megiddo.

VII

THE phone call got Art up from the Parrs' dinner table. When Art had let the caller see him, a man's voice spoke briefly through a blanked screen, giving him directions. "The corner of Belmont and Halsted. Be there in an hour. Don't forget to come alone."

"How will I know—?" but the connection had already been broken.

George, who had been listening in the background, now looked worried, which did not help Art's nerves at all. Ann, smiling though she was worried too, came up to Art. "You're going, then? Give Rita our love if you do get to see her. And listen to what she says. And don't do anything foolish. You won't get lost now, will you?"

"No. No, I won't. Well then, I'm off." He left the house before they could change their minds completely and begin to argue with him not to go. He had prepared himself somewhat by purchasing a map of the city's slidewalk system from an autovendor, and to pick out a good route to Belmont and Halsted was no trouble at all. He even detoured through a busy shopping center with the idea of shaking off anybody who might be trying to follow him.

Chicago was a place where people walked, or at least rode standing on their moving walkways. In this it was unlike most of mid-California, where a man trying to move any distance on foot soon found himself a helpless alien in a world that had been planned and built and paved and spaced for surface vehicles. By night out there a walking man was a blind alien once the particular slidewalk or statwalk he was on had taken him out of the particular region where he lived. The tall islands of glittering buildings seen in the distance all looked pretty much alike, and the daytime mountains were gone. A walking man could think that the passing tides and torrents of headlights and taillights went on forever.

Here in Chicago things were closer together and more reachable, more on a human scale, save for the towers that clustered in the center of the city, the place a few Chicagoans still called the Loop.

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Here signs named the streets at every corner, address numbers were consistent where they could be seen, and the city was covered by the vast slidewalk grid. But now at sunset most of the walks were only thinly occupied. The crowded shopping center had evidently been fed most of its customers by surface vehicle, for its large parking lots looked nearly full. The people Art saw on the walks kept looking at one another in mutual wariness as they passed.

Art kept to the main thoroughfares, which Ann had said were fairly well patroled by the police. Plenty of artificial light fell on the faintly whispering slidewalks, and on the new, high, blind walls that now made up so much of the city's face. Next to the vehicle lanes of the street there usually came a strip of grass, then the whispering walk, a wider strip of grass and trees (no shrubbery, though, wherein a man might lurk), and then the walls, high and unscaleable. Walls of workerless, humming factories, or walls of defended blockhouses like George's. Art, searching out his path tonight between the walls, was reminded of a maze he had once seen in the laboratory of a psychologist who had been experimenting with rats. With the going of the sun, the trees growing in the tended spots and strips of grass took on an unreal, misplaced look. Their June leaves were as green as signals in the streetlights' brightness. And the streets' steady vehicular traffic, dipping or rising as the streets passed under or over the moving walks, was also quite unreal to a slidewalking man; the people in the cars were like fish in an aquarium, dim sliding shapes bound into their own world.

"See that one there?" the psychologist who ran the rats had said. "Looks fine and healthy, doesn't he? Fat and sleek and bright-eyed compared with most of the others."

"How do you keep some of 'em that way, with so many crowded in?"

"They're supposed to be crowded in. I'm studying the effects of overpopulation. And he's really no healthier than the others are. He's like a sleepwalker, passive, nonsexual . . ."

"What about the others?"

"Various reactions. See the shabby one with all the energy? He's what we call a 'prober'. Hyper- and homo-sexual. Hyperactive altogether, often turns cannibal. Only good point is he's not a status-seeker as most of the males are."

THUNDER rumbled somewhere. Or was it thunder? Close above the streetlights the night pressed down, opaque and prematurely black. Above the brilliant lights there might be stars or clouds or watching eyes, nothing could be seen.

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Art ran his maze. After leaving the shopping center he changed slidewalk directions twice, navigating with his map. He was sliding east along Belmont Avenue, calculating the distance to Halsted Street, when a passing police car slowed, keeping pace with him for ten or fifteen seconds. Art threw one half-scowling glance toward the car and just kept on walking, until it pulled away.

A minute later he wished it back. Glancing down a comparatively dim side street as he crossed an intersection, he saw a group of four or five male figures walking together two long blocks away. They were shouting in rough voices and waving their arms. Fortunately they were a little too far off to be concerned with Art. He would bet that they meant trouble for someone, though.

Thunder rolled again. Hyperactive, and they often turned cannibal. But the psychologist with his crowding studies had been too wise to offer any cure-all for human nastiness. Certainly not the simple absence of crowding. There was still plenty of violence on farms.

Art's nerves relaxed a little when the band of toughs passed out of sight, then tightened again as he arrived at the intersection to which he had been told to come. It was a busy place, the center of a small vending district. He alighted on a statwalk bathed in the rippling noon of a barred display window. People moved around him, shopping or aimlessly walking. No one moved at once to approach Art, and as far as he could tell no one was watching him.

Another police car, or perhaps the same one, came easing around a corner, and Art turned away from it, pretending to study the contents of the vendor's window. He heard the car halt just a little distance off, and wait there, turbines idling with a muffled whine. Maybe they were just keeping a protective watch over the pedestrians in sight. If they were trying to follow him to Rita, surely they would be more subtle about it than this. But now it seemed to Art that the police and Family Planning probably knew already where she was. He pictured Hall conferring with cool and crafty agents, all of them agreeing to wait until the crime had been irrevocably committed before they sprang their trap. We're not out to get her, Hall had said.

Art inventoried the window until he heard the police car pull away. A few seconds later another car drove up to the curb beside him, one of its windows lowered. A man's voice called softly: "Are you Rodney?"

"Yes." Art skipped across the slidewalk to the curb.

A rear door opened for him. "Get in."

He got in and pulled the door shut and the car moved out. There were two men with him in the car, one driving and the other beside

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Art in the rear. As soon as the auto had turned out of the busy intersection, the man in back took Art by the neck and pushed him impersonally down to the floor.

"We don't wancha see where we're going. Get under this." A musty-smelling, opaque blanket of some kind was thrown over his head.

Opaque blankets like this one were not commonly found in the possession of proper people. Suddenly all the possibilities of evil began to open. Art could fear that he was not being taken to Rita at all, he was being gotten rid of as a troublemaker. Meanwhile the car purred on, no one in it having anything to say. It stopped and started and turned in traffic. Art no longer had the faintest idea of the direction in which he was moving. There was a faint odor of perfume, or perhaps of some kind of drug, in the car or clinging to the blanket. He told himself firmly that his new fears were ridiculous. Anyway, it was too late now to start having them.

He crouched awkwardly beneath the blanket, breathing uncomfortably and pulling at his beard. Just let him have one chance to talk with Rita, face to face. She would not be able to stick to her mad plan. She had always gone along with him on the few occasions when he had really insisted on having something his own way. If she were able to face him with this decision, she would not simply have left him a note and fled. He had to believe that he would be able to make her change her mind.

How could he have lived with her for more than three years and not know her any better than he did? But Rita didn't know him, either, if she thought he would simply let her wreck her life this way. That was the important thing. The number of children and the legal problems were secondary. To save her was what he was really fighting for.

The car turned, slowed, turned once more, crept ahead, and shortly stopped.

"We get out here. Don't look around, just go straight into the building."

The blanket was pulled away and Art saw that they were parked in an alley. Anonymous rough brick walls were close on either hand. As he got out of the car one of his escorts turned him toward an open doorway, some kind of unmarked service entrance, in the rear of a sizable, dimly lighted building.

One of his guides, a graying, tough-looking man, came along, walking a pace or two ahead of Art to show him the way. Art followed down a long shabby passage between walls of painted concrete block and up a narrow flight of stairs whose carpet had begun to wear. The place was a run-down apartment building, or perhaps a hotel. This impression was strengthened as they traversed an-

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other passage, that twisted past closed and numbered doors. The building was certainly old, but reasonably clean and well-maintained.

At last Art's guide stopped and pointed to a door. "She's in here. I'll come back in fifteen, twenty minutes, and we'll take ya back where we picked ya up." The man turned his back indifferently and walked away.

Art tapped on the door, then turned the old knob and pushed it open. Rita was sitting with her back to him, in a worn plastic armchair, wearing a silvery bikni that sparkled in the light of the small room's single lamp, and staring out through the one small window at the night. She looked around, startled, at Art's entrance, and he saw that above the bikni bottom her belly still bulged slightly with three months' illegitimate pregnancy—he was not too late. As she recognized him, love and fear and defiance came into her face, and she jumped up from the chair. A second later she opened her arms.

"COME home with me now," Art murmured, almost sleepily, about ten minutes later. His voice was half muffled by the single pillow on the small bed. Rita's hair, spread artlessly on the same pillow, was silver and gold in the light of the cheap lamp, as it would be in the best light anywhere. A gleam of almost the same color came from the plastic armchair, where her discarded bikni lay.

"No, I can't." Her voice was small but did not hesitate. "They'll kill my baby if I do." Unable to lie still after saying those unsettling words, she got up from the cot and went to close the window, against which rain was just starting to splash.

Art also sat up and put his feet on the floor. He had suddenly realized that a good many minutes had passed, that his escort would soon be back for him, and that so far Rita and he had talked very little, and that mainly about how they loved and missed each other and whether Timmy and Paula might be much upset by what was going on.

He stood up and reached for his codpiece, which had been thrown onto the armchair too. "You're coming home with me, so don't argue about it. You haven't committed any real crime as yet, and there isn't any reason why you can't just walk out of here. A man from Family Planning came to see me, and from what he said I'm sure they won't place any charges, *if* we just turn in this fetus as we're required to do."

"I can't, I can't. I wish you would try to understand. I wish you could stand by me." Her tender body turned in the lamplight, naked and unprotected. His heart turned over.

"*Why* can't you do it, for sex's

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sake?" he demanded, more savagely than he had meant.

"B-because it's living. It's my baby, and it's part of you I have inside me. It would be like killing you. Oh, Art." Even slight pregnancy always made women look ridiculous and she would look more so when she put the bikni on again. Why couldn't anybody make clothes in which a pregnant girl looked less grotesque? Maybe such clothes were made somewhere. But then, Art realized abruptly, Rita's pregnancy was probably going to be ended in one or two more days. One way or another.

Now she got her bikni from the chair and did start to put it on. She looked fragile and vulnerable and ridiculous and he loved her tremendously. Her breasts were fuller than usual; that would be the pregnancy, too, of course.

"I can't go through this again," she told him grimly, meanwhile working on a strap. "I'm g-going to have myself sterilized when this is over, even if the government doesn't make me. But I can't give up this baby who's already here." When Rita got very tired or upset she sometimes stuttered.

"You have two real children, who need their mother with them right now, not away somewhere in one of those places that Family Planning runs, or hiding out here."

"You say they play all day in that b-blockhouse park. I didn't have time to look around there much. Is it safe? Ann's very nice but sometimes she doesn't watch her children closely enough." By now she had gotten back into the bikni, and stood looking into the little mirror on the dresser, trying to pull and tug the bottom to a better fit.

"Very safe." By now Art too was dressed. "Come on, Rita, you're not killing any part of me by getting rid of a fetus. I'll still be here."

"But not inside me. That part of you won't grow anymore, or go on living."

"Bah. How do you know it's even mine?"

She did not answer, or look away from the mirror, but something in her face closed off.

He said: "If I had a diseased appendix you'd want it cut out and done away with."

"What's growing in me is not diseased—"

"How do you know, have you had any defect tests made?"

"—and even if it were, I'd love it."

If this kept on he was going to grab her and shake her. "If you loved it—I mean, if you loved the potential child it might become—you know what I mean—you'd want to save it from a lifetime of being unwanted by the world."

"I want him. His mother wants him." Now Rita was getting angry too. "We should kill him now because he's going to have a very tough time someday? Then I suppose we'd better not take any

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chances,' we'd better knock Timmy's and Paula's heads in because someday they're likely to have a tough time too."

Sublimation! He knew that he was right, but where was the argument to use? Not what the neighbors might someday say; that wouldn't work with Rita. It came down really to their duty to the overcrowded world, of course, sacrificing a personal wish for mankind in the abstract. For the good of mankind, everyone's reproductive urges, weak or strong, just had to bow aside. But those were not phrases with which to belabor one's suffering wife. How to make the truth sound less self-righteous, speechy and highflown?

There came a knocking at the door. On his way to answer, Art said over his shoulder: "You're coming back to Ann's with me now to get the children, and then you're coming home."

"No, I'm not." Stubborn as a mule, just like her sister-in-law. You might have thought the blood relationship was there.

This time the knock was loud. Art reached the door and flung it open. The man who stood there, the same graying escort, looked at Art's face and hesitated. Then, in a more respectful tone than he had used before, he asked: "You about ready to leave? Don't worry, she'll be outta here in a couple days."

"My wife is leaving with me. Now."

"I'm not going, Art. Don't ask me—oh, I wish you hadn't come."

A PAIR of young women were coming along the hallway, talking and giggling about something. They eyed Art strangely, and as they passed the doorway they glanced through it into Rita's room, curiosity showing through the pale makeup that masked their faces. They were made up worse than the B-girls in the tavern had been, and dressed worse too, for those two wore loose shrouding robes, totally obscene draperies of brown and gray that no woman would wear except . . . except . . .

"What kind of a place—?" barked Art, glaring wildly at the man who faced him in the hall. The man took a step backward, startled.

Art turned quickly and confronted Rita. Lightning flared, twice, very bright through the window just behind her. In the repeated violence of light Art could see the main front of the building he was in, Rita's room being evidently in a projecting wing. DIANA ARMS APARTMENTS, said a cheap new sign above the main entrance at ground level. Above, molded into the old concrete that arched above the entrance, were other words, not conspicuous but picked out now by perfect light and some trick of the speed-reading brain.

CHICAGO MATERNITY HOSPITAL
NURSES' QUARTERS

"What kind of place is this?" He

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grabbed at her, while thunder detonated. "Answer me, what kind of place?" He saw his hands shaking her, shaking Rita, with a violence that no one should dare to offer her.

Rita slapped him in the face. Never before. Art backed away from her slowly, as she began to cry. He backed up three steps and bumped into the man who had come to take him away and who now took a grip on Art's arm. When Art tried to pull free, the man said something and only tightened his hold. Art turned in instant rage and struck out with his fist. The blow was clumsy but by chance he got most of his weight behind it and it took his enemy by surprise. Art felt human tissue yield with a crunch beneath his knuckles and then he was no longer being held.

Now once more he had Rita in his grip. She was struggling with him, trying to break free. She screamed: "Do you think I like it, being here in a whorehouse? Do you know what I feel about anything? Let go!"

Even in his rising madness he had no intention of hurting Rita. His only thought was to save her, get her out of here. After he had gotten her, screaming, out of the little room, there were frightened faces in his way, and doors, and scrambling bodies. All these were obstacles that must be pushed or knocked aside. Strong hands came from somewhere and fastened—on him, but he struck out blindly and kept trying to pull Rita free. Her being here was not to be endured.

An expert foot tripped him, and down he went on a dirty floor. His arm was clamped and bent until he must let go of Rita's wrist. Massive weights sat on him, crushing out what little of his wind was left.

"Stop it!" a rough male voice demanded. "Stop. You gonna stop?" It had been barking the same words at him for some time, and finally he had to listen.

"Uh."

A hand turned Art's face up from the floor. "In th' name o' pure chastity, you gonna behave?"

"Yuh."

"All right, let 'im up. Sublimation, we get 'em all in here, every kind of nut there is."

The powerful hands that held Art down reversed themselves and hoisted, and without even trying he was on his feet. He was dizzy, the world was gray with his faintness. Unused to such exertions. Sweat and dirt were in his eyes, all mixed with helpless tears. His chest heaved in wind-broken spasms. There was a pain inside his shoulder, where something seemed to have been torn.

Rita's voice was somewhere nearby, demanding: "Where is he? Let me see. Oh, the fool. If you've hurt him, I'm going to—to—"

"Oh, lady, please, he's all right, see? Just his wind knocked out. He

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was out to tear the place apart. Look at my chaste eye, excuse th' language, where he slugged me."

Good.

Rita was visible as a blur before him now, and they were speaking to her with respect. Of course she was a boarder here, only a fugitive, not a—no, no, of course she was not that. He felt her cool hands, moving on his hands and his face.

"Don't start him up again, now, lady; please. Let us get him the purity outta here. We'll see he gets home safe."

"Art? Oh, Art, forgive me. Are you all right?"

"Come home with me."

"No."

He nodded. Then he was being led away. He no longer tried to resist.

A man's voice muttered: "Where's the Holy Joe, why don't he look after these celibatin' people of his? I'm sick of the whole celibatin' mess." Then the voice lowered itself to ask a whispered question.

"No! Take 'im back where ya picked 'im up, and just leave him there, nice and safe. Is somebody usin' the car now?" There was a fresh uproar in the middle distance, men's voices raised in some angry quarrel. "What's that?"

"Sounds like the homos again. I tell ya; we get every kind of a nut there is. Lemme put this guy in here for a minute."

The grip that had remained on Art's arm guided him into another room. He was released and the door was closed behind him. He groped along the wall in darkness and found a switchplate, which in response to human fingers on its surface turned on a lamp.

THE light was dim and his eyes were still befogged with tears and sweat, but he made out that the small room possessed a cot. He stumbled over and sank down on it, still wheezing for breath. He had to regain his wind, and more importantly his self-control. His strong point was supposed to be intelligence, and so he had to think.

Forget that Rita was staying in this whorehouse. Forget that the arrogant nameless obstetrician (Holy Joe, the bouncer had said—a cultist, then? One of Ann's priestly friends?) was using this former nurses' quarters of a doubtless abandoned hospital as his maternity ward.

Remember this, seen in the fortuitous lightning flash: DIANA ARMS APARTMENTS. Let them use all the blindfolds they liked, now he could locate this place again. To what end? Should he tell all to Family Planning? Should he tell George in what sort of place his sister was holed up? George coming here to drag her out would likely kill somebody in the process, or they would kill him. Anyway, it was likely that her brother would let her

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stay here since she wanted it that way.

The door of the room opened quietly, and a nude girl stepped in, carrying under one arm a bundle of cloth rulled up as Fred's karate outfit had been. Art blinked his eyes and found that he could focus clearly now. She was young and blond, flat-bellied and full-breasted, and her face was made up into a pale, cold mask.

The girl closed the door behind her and then froze, motionless, staring at him haughtily. In a cold voice she asked: "Is this the right room? I don't think it can be mine. What are you doing here? I don't want men in my room."

Art shifted his weight on the cot, started to get up, and then when his body made its great reluctance known he let himself stay sitting there. He knew, he understood perfectly well, that he should speak up without delay and tell the prostitute that for once she was indeed mistaken. This one time she had actually, really, walked into the wrong room. He understood it perfectly well yet he said nothing. Was it that he had not yet regained wind enough to speak? Was something wrong now with his throat?

The girl now was moving away from the door, edging along the wall opposite where Art sat on the cot. Already she was gradually unrolling the thick, opaque robe that she had brought in under her arm, and now she was beginning to cover her body with it. As she passed the switchplate on the wall she turned the room's light to a cooler, softer glow. In her movement she gave the impression of trying to keep as far as possible from Art. She turned her painted face away from him, fixed in a mask of bitterness and contempt, while her motions, graceful as a dancer's, expressed distaste and even fear.

By now the robe was half unrolled, and now it covered half her flesh. This girl was good, she knew her trade. "Don't make a move toward me," she said in a low voice, tense with raw repression. "I don't want to be pawed by a man. I don't want you even to stare at me."

In his adolescence Art had gone twice to brothels. Both times guilt feelings had hampered his performance, and the results had been unsatisfactory. He was still very nearly a virgin as far as sublimation was concerned. Since his marriage he had come to think of himself as grown above all that kind of thing, and he had never, since marriage, been seriously tempted toward it. If Rita had ever wanted to do anything like this, he hadn't been aware of it. Did he know what she felt about anything?—those were her words. He would have done it with her, if she had ever asked. What went on between husband and wife was nobody else's business.

The girl had nearly reached the

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window now. "Maybe you don't *want* to touch me, though," she said, turning her eyes on Art as if with dawning hope. Oh, yes, this girl was good. "Maybe you're a pure, chaste man. Maybe you're a person who knows what a human being really likes."

She had reached the window, and now she turned her pale mask of a face to look up and out through the upper panes, left unshaded for this very purpose while the lower were fitted with plastic shields in imitation of stained glass. By now her body from the neck down was completely hidden in the long robe, and now her simulated fear and tension were fading out, were being put aside by something else.

By an exaltation that, once he let it grip him, might be impossible to deny.

"The stars," she said, her voice now more distant and far softer than before. "The stars are very beautiful tonight."

Of course tonight's sky was all clouds and rain, and the stars were only a part of her routine. But that hardly mattered. In his mind the perfect blue-white points of light were there. Her voice and her face and the attitude of her body beneath the long concealing robe made it all true.

Again he realized dully that he must move and speak, he must explain his presence here and make her stop. But for the moment he could not. His breathing, already slowed to normal, became still slower while his eyes rested on the girl. Her hair reminded him of Rita's, and in other ways they looked something alike. This girl was physically quite attractive, as were all the most successful whores. The more lust there was to sublimate, the more the act could mean. Of course nothing to do with sex was ever reducible to such a simple formula as that; but it seemed to Art that with this girl the meaning of the act of sublimation was likely to be very great indeed. To throw down the weight of sex and stand beside her, for the moment straighter, taller, freer, than that encumbrance would ever let you stand. To stand on top of sex, and use it for a footstool, and look with this girl at her imaginary stars and take their light into his being. Tonight he yearned very powerfully to do just that.

He knew it was a wrong and perverse yearning that he struggled with, and once he had thought that such urges were over for him, all safely outgrown. But now in his weakness and defeat they came to trouble him once more. Well, since an act of sublimation promised all the comfort of which he stood in need, why not? Why not, just this once?

No! He was not going to be so spineless, so weak-willed. Art resisted. He called up images of Eros, lust-knotted bodies sweating, writhing, roaring, raging to attain a

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pinnacle of lust yet higher than the one they slipped and labored on. He fastened his mind upon the remembered image of the girl's bare body as he had seen it when she first entered the room. He pictured Rita's body, spread out invitingly before him. But all the fleshly stirrings that he now managed to arouse in himself would only go as fuel for sublimation if he faltered. And he was faltering. The consciousness of sex-as-God that never should entirely leave an adult's mind was flickering now and fading dangerously in his.

"The stars are beautiful," the girl said again, and now her voice sounded like winter bells. "So beautiful, so far away."

The rain drummed on the window steadily, but had no power to make her words ridiculous. Art feebly tried to cling to images of female nakedness, but all were still and flat and lifeless now, remote and meaningless as old photographs.

Just as he might have gotten up and gone to join the girl at the window, the thought presented itself that the men would soon be coming back for him, and they would have quite a laugh if they came in and found him stargazing. The banal fear was enough to tip the balance on the other side.

"I'm sorry," he said, and stood up with a grunt. His hands and knees were quivering still and his wrenched shoulder hurt. He fumbled in his pockets for some money with which to tip the girl; probably she would make a fuss if he tried to walk out without tipping her. At least he seemed to recall that things had been that way in the brothels of his youth. "I'm not a customer."

She had turned from the window and was regarding him with great surprise. He handed her money and explained: "There's really been a mistake." Mechanically a gentleman, he squeezed the girl's breast through her robe.

"Mistake? I'll say!" The wintry voice had broken suddenly to nasty shrillness. "This is only five dollars you gimme!"

"It's all you'll get," said Art, now dangerously calm in his exhaustion. "I told you I'm not a customer."

With the money in hand the girl rushed out of the room. Art followed, wearily, as far as the corridor, where he stood waiting. In a moment his guide, with a swollen cheekbone but the same indifferent expression as before, and another man, came into sight. "I'm ready," Art told them. "Take me back."

He rode under the blanket again in the silent car, and smiled grimly to himself. *Diana Arms Apartments.* He was let out of the car at the busy intersection where he had been picked up. After all he had just been through, a late trip home by slidewalk seemed nothing at all to be concerned about, and he did

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not even look around when once there came to him the sound of distant screams.

When he got back to the Parrs, who seemed to have been waiting anxiously, Art did not have a great deal to say. Yes, he had seen her and yes, she still wanted to go through with it. She seemed to be all right, and she said they were treating her well enough.

"What kind of a place is she staying in?" Ann wanted to know. "And what's wrong with your arm?"

"I, ah, twisted my shoulder somehow, opening the car door."

Ann, evidently assuming from Art's defeated attitude that he was now going to let his wife do as she chastely well pleased, became very comforting and motherly. Art let her rub his shoulder with some kind of medicine that George used for his occupational aches and pains. He also let her go on thinking what she liked.

George appeared noticeably relieved by Art's safe return. "I should have gone," he muttered several times.

No, you shouldn't, thought Art. At last Ann released him and he dragged himself upstairs and fell into the guest room bed.

In the morning, he decided painfully, he would go to Family Planning, and have a talk with Mr. Hall. There was really nothing else that he could do.

Sleep was a long time coming.

VIII

"MR. BARNABY of the Homosexual League is here asking to see you, sir."

Oscar Grill, director of the Chicago office of the Bureau of Family Planning, slumped back in his chair and gazed unhappily at the image of his secretary in the intercom plate. "What's he here for? The same as usual, I suppose."

"I tried to find out, sir, but he was vague. I suppose the same as usual."

Grill made a grimace of annoyance. He had barely had time this morning to sit down and assure himself of what a busy day he had ahead, and now here came Barnaby again. About a year ago the president of the Illinois Homosexual League had begun a series of drop-in visits, coming around about once every two months. Barnaby came, and talked mostly in generalities, and sometimes they had lunch together, and Grill had never been able to understand just what his visitor was hoping to accomplish by visiting. It wasn't that Barnaby was personally attracted to him; that surely would have been made plain by now, and didn't seem too likely anyway, given Grill's paunchy, jowly appearance and the fact that he was sliding fast past middle age.

What made the situation difficult for Grill was that the president of the state Homo League was too important to be casually brushed

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off. No politician wanted to risk alienating a bloc of votes of the League's size, and Oscar Grill was, among other things, very much a politician. And general elections were coming up within the year.

Grill sighed, mentally trying to rearrange his morning schedule. He wondered which appointments he might be able to put off. "I suppose you'd better send him in right away. Maybe I can cut it short."

"Yes sir."

Seizing the moment of peace before Barnaby walked through the door, Grill closed his eyes and tried to achieve an instant of total relaxation. But his job was difficult, and his thoughts were hard to quiet quickly. He wanted to be sure to get to today's luncheon meeting, with the local heads of other bureaus, Art, Poverty, and Vandalism. Important political decisions were in the offing. And sometime today he wanted to try to talk again with his semi-official contacts at the UN's Chicago consulate, to try to find out what might be delaying the latest population forecast. There was a fog of rumors surrounding that report; probably when he did learn what it contained, he would wish that he hadn't.

The door was opening, and Grill opened his eyes and stood up and came around his desk, setting himself to be courteous but still to ease his visitor out as quickly as he could. At least he had an obviously and honestly crowded desk for Barnaby to notice.

The president of the Homo League entered, moving with his usual slightly feminine walk. His basic physique was that of an average male, but his face was strikingly handsome—or perhaps pretty—and his long hair was a natural-looking bright red. In the League as elsewhere, appearance evidently counted for a lot in getting to be president. Barnaby wore a conservatively tiny bikni not too much different from the standard female model, the bottom lacking the exaggerated fullness of the usual male codpiece. Mr. Barnaby's bra was functional; medical science had given him that much in the way of matching his biology to his lusts.

"How do you do, sir?" Grill asked formally, extending a hand in greeting.

"Not well today, Oscar, not very well." Barnaby's voice was husky rather than deep. He shook Grill's fingers delicately. "I am becoming afraid to travel through the streets. There is an organized harassment that I must endure. Good citizens pay taxes, then find that their government offers them no protection."

Grill said: "Won't you sit down? You mean you're being picketed again by that bluenose group?"

"Again? One might say that it has become almost continuous." Adjusting his shoulder bag with a large hand, Barnaby settled himself

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in a visitor's chair. "Not only is our headquarters under seige, as it were, but some of these Young Virgins have taken to following my car through the streets. I should warn you that some of them have followed me here today."

Grill had seated himself and was toying with the corner of a stack of printout that lay awaiting his attention on his desk, though he had little hope that the hint would be taken. "Well, I can certainly sympathize. I really wish there was something I could do but, twins, we're sometimes picketed here ourselves."

"Yes, I'm sure you are, and by many of the same people." Barnaby crossed his hairless, slightly plump legs. "Oscar, it seems to me of the utmost importance that those of us who lead in conserving traditional values should support one another, for the cause of Eros and the good of society. Men and women of good will should stand together whenever possible, that's all I mean. I realize that you have no power to punish those wretches who are out there picketing."

"I certainly don't." Grill sneaked a look at his clock.

"I did go to the police about the picketing, as I believe you suggested once before." Barnaby seemed unable to keep from exciting himself over the pickets. "I tried to point out to the police the difference between our country's traditional freedoms and the anarchy those bluenoses want. They paint their dirty words right on their signs, and wave them about in public places, and the police and the courts will do nothing to put a stop to it!"

Grill shrugged. "I suppose if the police are providing you with physical protection, that's really about all you can expect."

"Oscar," said Barnaby reproachfully. He leaned across the desk and lowered his voice. "Which is the more to be feared, injury to the body or poisoning of the mind? And I am more concerned for the youth of the community than for myself. What will happen to them, growing up in a world where nothing is considered obscene any longer?"

ART woke up slowly. There was something very nasty that he would have to face on waking, and so it was pleasant to delay the process. Then he moved, and felt a twinge in his shoulder, and all his memories of yesterday came back. With a groan he sat up in the guest-room bed. His watch read half past eight.

His situation looked no better in the morning light than it had in midnight gloom. There was nothing for it but to be a good citizen and go to Family Planning. Mr. Hall had said they were not out to *get* anyone, at least not anyone like Rita. People like her were only the

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innocent victims of the midwifers and their gangs. And of their well-meaning relatives. Too bad if the relatives got in trouble. Art's first responsibility was to his wife, not to the relatives who should never have gotten her into this mess in the first place. Even if they were only trying to help.

He didn't want to think about the Parrs right now, but it was hard to avoid while he was in their house. He got out of bed and began to get ready to go downstairs.

While he showered and shaved and dressed he pictured raiding police breaking down the doors of that former nurses' quarters, carting off hysterical whores, handcuffing thugs. Then along came their quietly efficient lieutenant, leading Rita safely out. When she saw Art (who had ridden along in the lead car with the lieutenant) she burst into tears, and threw repentant arms around his neck . . .

More likely she would slap his face again. The scenario was fundamentally unconvincing, so Art had to give up on it and think of something else while he held fast to his determination.

Aromas of coffee and warm food now reached him in the upstairs hall. He promised himself that he would say nothing to the Family Planning authorities about George and Ann. Well, sooner or later he would doubtless have to say *something* about them, for he was going to be asked a lot of questions. But he might make their immunity a condition of his giving information. Something like that. Anyway, he kept telling himself, if they wound up in trouble it would serve them right, for helping Rita get herself into such a mess. His shoulder definitely felt better this morning. He would get Ann to rub it with liniment again tonight, if he was still staying here. If she was still staying here.

After taking a quick peek into the children's room and finding it already deserted, Art went downstairs. In the kitchen he found George and Ann facing each other across the breakfast table, where Art's place was also set. Dirty dishes and a minor litter of garbage testified that the children had already eaten before going out to play.

Even as Art's in-laws said good morning to him, they seemed to him to be exchanging guilty looks. They had provided Art and his children with food and lodging, but what did they count for, compared with the harm they were doing Rita? Their intentions had been good, of course, but what of that?

George raised troubled eyes. "Art, what are your plans now?"

"I don't know." As soon as Art was seated, Ann began to ply him silently with toast and protein bars and coffee. His fingers fumbled on the jelly jar. He asked unnecessarily: "Are the children out in the playground?"

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He was assured they were, and with that an awkward silence fell. He wished he had gone straight out of the house, but that would have been insulting, and besides, being under a strain increased his tendency to get sick if he didn't eat any breakfast.

Still, he couldn't stand to sit there. He gobbled his food and quickly pushed back his chair. "I'm going out." No one said anything to him as he fled the house.

It was a bright warm morning; only puddles here and there gave evidence of last night's rain. Once outside the blockhouse walls Art breathed a little easier, at least at first. As soon as he came to a public computer terminal he went in and obtained the address of the Chicago office of Family Planning. With a slight feeling of relief he saw that he would have to travel a considerable distance to reach the place; he needed some time to think over just what he was going to say. They weren't out to get Rita, though, they were really on her side. Once on the proper slidewalk, he drew a deep breath, and again remarked to himself that the weather was fine today. Who cared?

Reaching the Family Planning office seemed to take almost no time at all, and somehow he could get no constructive thinking done en route. The office occupied a new, fairly large building, one of the foothills surrounding the central Loop's high range. From a block or two away Art could see that there was an unusually dense crowd gathered on the statwalk in front of the place. As he drew a little nearer he realized this was no ordinary pedestrian jam. There was a stack of placards on the pavement, ready for distribution; some kind of demonstration must be shaping up. Should he go on in? If he didn't make himself go in and face the authorities now, he never would. Ignoring the murmuring, jostling crowd as best he could, he pushed his way into the lobby.

In the vast ground-floor lobby of glass and marble he approached a receptionist, a voluptuous girl who smiled at him enticingly from behind her desk. As befitted her place of employment she was very conservatively dressed, wearing only a few electrostatically clinging sequins and pads.

Art halted in front of her desk, not as by the application of brakes, but as with a complete loss of momentum. This was it. He was finished. His mind had gone as blank and bare as the smooth expanse of receptionist's skin confronting him. Somehow he had convinced himself that once he got this far all the right words would flow, but that had been a lie. Now here he was, and all the words were gone in fear. To ask for Mr. Hall would be like leaping over a cliff.

"I'm from California," he began with a great effort, helped along by the girl's encouraging eyes. "Still, I

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have important business with you here. I'd like to see—the director or someone." Art was suddenly and completely sure that he never wanted to talk to Mr. Hall again. He would never be able to convince Hall that George and Ann were innocent, or at least that they deserved a break, not after the tough time Ann had given him. And she and George hadn't even asked Art where he was going this morning.

The girl's eyes turned grave. "The director is a very busy man," she said. "If you'll tell me the nature of your business, perhaps I can help you."

"My business is, uh, important." Of course the director was not going to see everyone who just walked in. One could hope that everyone here would be too busy for that.

The girl's eyes narrowed slightly, searching Art's face. He had the idea that she could see his guilty knowledge, and was already pressing an alarm button hidden beneath her desk. "I can arrange for you to talk to a social worker. Are you in a hurry?"

"I—" When their computer learned his name it would give him to Mr. Hall, and Mr. Hall would seize upon him, not to be denied a single scrap of information. Art would stumble helplessly into a betrayal of the Parrs, and Rita would hate him for that, even if she were not thrown in jail and forcibly sterilized herself. "No, there's no hurry," he told the girl.

"May I have your name, please?" the receptionist pulled a computer-input slate toward her on its decorative coiled cable, and took up an electronic stylus.

"I—" Ann was at this moment caring for Art's children. George was risking bloody beatings from machines, to pay for safe blockhouse playspace and midwifers and cinnamon-flavored protein bars that tended to turn lumpy in the stomach. Art's thought, now scrambling like a cornered animal for some way out, seized suddenly upon the possibility that Rita's illegal operation was being performed this very morning. If so she would certainly be jailed instead of rescued if Art led Family Planning to her.

In his present state he took this as excuse enough to flee. Without even delaying to pinch the receptionist goodbye, Art took a step back from her desk. He blurted out wild words about returning later. He turned and fled.

"RADICALS and bluenoses, repressors of all that makes Man at one with a billion years of his animal heritage!" Barnaby's voice had grown shrill. "Are we to abandon the youth of the world to them?"

Looking down, with Barnaby, from an open window of his office, Director Grill had a good view of the wide statwalk in front of the Family Planning building. Two

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competing picket lines had just been organized down there, and both of them were on the march, weaving and writhing like antagonistic serpents. The lines had formed with a healthy distance between them but were gradually being forced closer to each other by the pressure of a mass of onlookers, whose expectation of a riot was probably going to fulfill itself. It seemed likely to Grill, who had seen this sort of thing happen elsewhere, that a critical mass of active humanity would soon be reached. To carry the analogy with atomic fission further, a block away a column of helmeted city police was marching in, a damping rod about to be thrust into an overheating pile.

Sporadic shouting drifted up to Grill's office window, but as yet he had seen no actual violence. He was not too high above the picket lines to tell that one of them was composed mostly of radical-looking young people, the girls wearing their hair long, the men short-haired and clean-shaven, both sexes dressed in opaque garments that covered half their bodies or more. These of course were the Young Virgins, the objects of Barnaby's wrath. In the opposing picket line, men and women of ordinary appearance were in the majority, though there was a noticeable admixture of men in biknis, and women in codpieced, translucent business suits.

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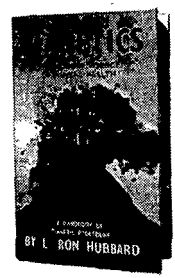

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"I see your League has some counter-picketers out today," Grill commented.

"Naturally we do!" Barnaby ran nervous fingers through his bright red hair. "We don't intend to succumb without a struggle."

Grill decided that the time had come for bluntness, whatever the result might be. "Frankly, I wish you hadn't decided on counter-picketing. Not in front of *my* building."

"What? But we must take action. Look, look down there! A sign that says 'sublimate', in big bold letters, being waved around in a public place!"

Grill looked down and saw. He also saw another sign, in bigger, bolder letters yet: STOP MORAL FREE FALL. He wondered honestly which side that one was intended to be on.

"Let them go to their monasteries and lamaseries and nunneries to have that kind of freedom," Barnaby was saying. "Let them go behind walls, away from the innocent, and do what they like."

Grill drew a deep breath. "You know, if I was coldly logical about my job . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, I might look with official favor upon the bluenoses. After all, the less sex activity there is, generally speaking, the fewer pregnancies and the less population pressure."

"Only in the most primitive societies!" snapped Barnaby. But then he fell silent and put on a mask of careful control, which Grill thought was concealing more fear than anger.

Emboldened by this, Grill went on: "I don't know if any society has ever been run on the basis of cold logic. Probably not. I'm sure ours isn't. People's emotional attitudes are the ultimate power, of course. And most of the people are with you, at least in your attitude toward bluenoses. If I were to come out strongly in favor of chastity today I'd doubtless be fired tomorrow."

Barnaby relaxed slightly. "You are joking. Of course there's no excuse for chastity. For a long time our League has shown the way toward the fullest enjoyment of sex without the slightest risk of pregnancy."

"Most people just don't enjoy your kind of sex, though," said Grill deliberately. "At least not as a steady diet. And the monasteries and other religious places you talk about are from my point of view very much like Homo League enclaves— they have a vanishingly low birth rate. So, I may not agree with the bluenoses emotionally, but I'm not going to try to put them out of business. I still don't dare to praise them publicly, but I can tell you off the record that I'm rather glad there are more and more lamaseries and nunneries these days."

There was silence, except for Barnaby clearing his throat. He

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seemed to be giving some point a deep reconsideration. "Really," he said at last, "I didn't come here with the main objective of getting your help against the bluenoses. I know I let them upset me too much. I can see, they do help you in your difficult job. But we've helped you even more, haven't we? For many years? I like to think that we in the League are your favorite citizens, so to speak. That there's a large backlog of goodwill built up between us."

"Of course." Grill sighed, left the window, and walked back to his desk. He did not want to watch another riot.

Privately, he had no more emotional sympathy for homosexuality than he did for chastity. Professionally, he was glad to accept all the help, from every quarter, that Family Planning and the world could get. The human world was in danger of collapsing by the weight of its own numbers, though you might not be able to tell that by what went on in Illinois.

On the walls of Grill's office the computer-drawn curves of the world demographic charts showed the danger in the form of the ever-worsening pressure of population. More people inevitably ate more food, and while around the world the food suppliers struggled to get ahead, sometimes they could not even manage to keep up. There were now laws restricting births in every country on the planet. It was mathematically, physically, inevitable that at some future time, by some combination of peaceful or violent forces, the world's population growth would finally be stopped—obviously it could not continue until human beings stood jammed shoulder to shoulder on every square meter of solid land. The approximately eight billion people who inhabited the world today could all, in theory, probably be stored within Chicago's borders, standing indoors and out, leaving the rest of the earth on which to grow their food.

Frighteningly many of the eight billion were hungry and sick today, and more would be tomorrow. Science had boosted the world's supply of available energy beyond all foreseeable needs by achieving controlled atomic fusion; by harnessing, as the popularizers of science put it, the power of the H-bomb and of the sun itself. The problems of producing and distributing adequate food, and providing medical care, were not so amenable to research and engineering. The leaders of the have-not nations spent their time in power in states of chronic desperation, weighing and selecting gamblers' moves to keep themselves in power and—sometimes this came first—to help their countrymen.

One aid toward staying in power was to point out a scapegoat or two

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on which the people could vent their hate and dissatisfaction. If there were any justification for the choice of scapegoat, so much the better. Another gamblers' move was the utterance of overt or implied threats. Often the threats were serious, even when spoken by the leader of a poor but desperate nation against a wealthy and much more powerful one. Today at least eighty nations were theoretically capable of producing atomic weapons, and fifteen or twenty or these had technologies sufficiently sophisticated to perhaps enable them to hide such outlaws weapons from the UN inspection teams. Delivery of a nuclear bomb could be accomplished by stealth if not by missile or aircraft. Biological weapons were easier to make, conceal, and deliver, and could be just as deadly if not as quick as nuclear blasts. Thus the voices of the have-nots must be heard in all the greatest capitals of the world. Thus if a new-born baby in Chicago consumed, statistically, three times the food of one new-born in India, it was considered only just and decent to limit the number of new-born Chicagoans, and the same with Londoners, Muscovites, babies of Peking and Tokyo. The starving child in the Indian village might never see a bite of the food thus theoretically saved for him, but who could say it was not just to offer him at least a chance? Thus, even among the haves, compulsory sterilization and abortion for women who could not limit their fertility in any other way. Thus, the illegitimacy of the third child. We may not feed the world, we may lack the knowledge or the will or the material wealth for that, but we will not let it watch us overeat.

Again, as he looked now at the charts, there darted across Grill's mind the question of why the latest population forecast had been delayed. He felt a foreboding chill.

"It seems to me," Barnaby was saying to him, "that in fact you owe us a real debt. Very few of the League's members have brought any children at all into the world—as yet."

Something in Barnaby's tone brought Grill's thoughts back firmly to his office. "As yet? Why do you put it that way?"

Barnaby did not answer at once. An alien hardness had come into his face. He continued to stand beside the window, watching Grill.

As Grill stood waiting beside his desk his mind started to relate that odd phrase "as yet" to the chain of Barnaby's odd visits, and to certain other terrible hints that Grill had lately received from other sources. The hints concerned recent advances in surgery, and in hormonal chemistry; until now, Grill had managed to avoid confronting their implications face to face.

Barnaby, as if reading the director's mind, was nodding slowly and solemnly now. "Maybe you've

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heard something about it? True male to female sex reversal is going to be possible. There've been doctors working on it in Sweden, and lately in Japan, and both groups seem to have been successful."

"Well. That's fine. I suppose many members of the League will want to avail themselves of the operation, to become practically complete women."

"Not just practically, Oscar. Truly complete. I want that. Does that surprise you?" Paradoxically, as he spoke of becoming a woman, Barnaby looked more normal than before, a male trapped in a masquerade costume he could not shed, a man grown weary and desperate beyond all words. "Does it make you laugh, to hear that I will want to bear a child? Two children, if I can."

Grill was far from laughter. "This is—beyond belief."

"Not to me." Barnaby's husky voice quavered. He spoke now as if confessing some terrible crime. "All my life, since I was a child myself, the thought has been in my mind that somehow—if I could have a son—what do you know about me, anyway?"

Like the first thunder of an unexpected storm, the sounds of rioting burst up abruptly from the street outside; Director Grill hardly noticed them. He moved behind his desk and sank slowly into his chair, without taking his eyes off Barnaby. "So," Grill said in a faint voice. "Today you have come here on business."

ART, while inside the building and knotted in his own problems, had forgotten completely about the demonstrations being organized outside. When he emerged from the lobby, practically at a run, he was at once caught up between chanting swirls of picketers and counter-picketers. When he pushed his way free he had been turned around, and stood still for a moment, disoriented, in the middle of the statwalk.

A short fat man carrying an armload of cheaply made, stick-mounted signs appeared at once beside Art, haranguing him. "Get yer sign, get yer placard here! Do yer *part*, sir, only a dollar." STOP MORAL FREE FALL, said the signs, or some of them at least. Others, interleaved, bore the proud legend LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

"I'm not involved in this," Art muttered, trying to get free of the peddler, not knowing which side the man thought he was on, or even what the two contending forces were. As soon as Art spotted a small gap between the picket lines he made for it. The pickets were chanting louder and louder, faster and faster, mouthing unintelligible rioters' warcries. The peddler would not give up but stayed at Art's side like a stubborn conscience, trying to sell him a sign.

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Moving together they were too big to get through the gap, and they, or Art at least, collided with one of the lines as it writhed snake-like toward him. A shout of anger went up from those he had bumped, followed by a cheer from the opposing ranks.

"Filthy censor! Bluenose!"

"Smear the queers! Smear the queers! Smear—"

A tall male figure loomed up in front of Art. Above the words STUDENTS FOR A CHASTE SOCIETY, handpainted on a dirty, opaque sweatshirt, the young man's face was clean-shaven, angry, florid, shouting. Someone bawling a song about love pushed Art from behind, whereupon the young man in front struck Art on the head with his flimsy sign.

Something was wrong, the blow should not have hurt so much. It was a great deadening bash that dented a vacuum into his skull, into which a tremendous pain was now about to rush . . .

There was a policeman in view. And other people, he could not tell who . . . Art was down, but somebody had him under the arms and was dragging him along . . . the blow from the flimsy sign should not have been so hard . . . now he was dying, or else . . .

IX

AFTER Art hurried out of the house, George and Ann remained seated at the breakfast table, alone now in the silent house, facing each other with glum expressions.

"I wonder what's happened to Fred," said Ann distantly, turning her head to look out through her window at the patio vines. "And I wonder if Rita has her baby yet." Then she gave up making conversation and brought her hands up to cover her face. "Oh, if Art turns us in today it's going to be all my fault."

"He won't," said George, putting into his voice a lot more certainty than he felt. "He doesn't want to get Rita in trouble. Anyway, there's no use blaming yourself if he does."

"He might." Ann spoke through her muffling hands, around her silver wedding ring. "You and Rita will be the ones who go to jail for conspiracy, but it'll be all my fault. Why did I have to tell her you had a student who could arrange things? Some criminal doctor."

George was irritated. "Hammad's no criminal, or I wouldn't have him as a student. I don't consider arranging for births to be a crime, and you don't either. I don't know of anything else he does that's outside the law."

"He arranges births and breaks the law just for money. I don't like that. Why couldn't we have waited until I heard from the Order of St. Joseph people?"

"You might have waited a long

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time, with their monastery burned down. Anyway, it might even be one of them who's doing the operation. I think it was smart for Hammad to farm it out."

"Someone else is doing it, while he gets paid. Hammad, I don't trust Hammad."

"Now's a fine time to tell me that," George grumbled. "Anyway, Rita's no Christian, she won't care who does it or why." As long as it's done competently. If it isn't—but there was nothing he could do.

Ann was silent behind her hands.

"Art won't turn us in," George repeated, trying to be comforting. To himself he thought that he could hardly blame Art for anything he did today. Art was the one they hadn't allowed for in their plans.

Still silent.

He reached across the table, pried one of Ann's hands down from its job of eye-hiding, and held it softly in his own. "Hey, things aren't that bad," he said. "Hey, lady, do you need some help?"

THE first time he had made that offer to Ann they had both been aboard a bus cruising at eighteen miles an hour along the sixty-lane freeway that ran from Bear Canyon to Pasadena, near the middle of Los Angeles. Five apish young men had also boarded at Bear Canyon, though George had not paid much attention to them then. Perhaps they had gotten on to follow Ann. She had five or six small children with her that day.

The five young men had taken seats just a little forward in the bus from Ann and her brood, and once the bus was isolated from the world in the flow of traffic they had begun talking loudly among themselves, boasting in obscene language of their skills at stealing, fighting, and sublimating. Ann was pretty good at ignoring them, but then one of the apes began to toss little wads of something or other in her direction. "Hey, lady, those all yours? Quintup-lets! Looks like you waited too long, decidin' which two to keep."

By now most of the other passengers had congealed in their seats, seeing and hearing nothing, feeling safer behind pretended walls.

"Hey, girly?" called the youth who had been tossing the spitballs. "Anyone ever tell you you'd look nice wrapped in a blanket down to your toenails?" He turned to a friend. "Red, you got some glad-rags with you?"

"Sure."

"Break'em out. Girly's gonna gaze at the stars with us."

An old woman sitting beside George muttered something to the effect that girls who dressed that way were just asking for trouble—and true enough, Ann had on an opaque blouse, and an opaque skirt that came down nearly to her knees. Maybe her dress was one reason why George had noticed her

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as early as he did. But that was irrelevant now.

"Do you need some help, lady?" he called to Ann politely, as he got up to stand in the narrow aisle, swaying there slightly with the motion of the bus. George was then twenty-one, half trained in karate, proud owner of a purple belt. He stood up with a feeling of necessity, without either much fear or sense of heroism. Vaguely he wished that he could have a chance to limber up.

"Yes, I believe I do." Ann's voice was as calm as if she had dropped a package in an awkward place and a presentable young man had offered to pick it up.

So George cleared his throat like a nervous orator and faced forward. He met the eyes of the five troublemakers, one after another, and wondered if there were any words that he might stop them with. A wise old instructor had once told George that if you were really ready for street trouble the readiness showed somehow and trouble never came, not unless you went out of your way to make it, which wise people in or out of karate never did. What words would have stopped me, George wondered, when I was just a kid and up to something wild? But he had never been as wild and apey as these five were acting now, and magic words eluded him. At the same time he was reassuring himself on a comforting point he had already noticed: the narrowness of the aisle. There might be five of them, but they could only come in reach of him one at a time.

If they were going to come at all. He could see in their faces that he had frightened them just by getting up to face them, and he hoped that his continued calm and that of the girl might be enough to keep them paralyzed. He raised his eyes toward the front of the bus, and met the driver's eyes in a mirror behind the driver's personal shield of armored glass. All around the bus the sixty-lane river of vehicles crept on, cutting it off from the rest of humanity and bearing it along. The driver was already trying to maneuver the bus into an outer lane and reach an emergency stopping bay, but to accomplish the maneuver might easily take ten minutes or so.

Meanwhile, maintaining a calm silence was not going to be enough, perhaps because the five had nowhere to retreat. Now their faces were hardening again; they were more afraid of something else, something that drove them on, than they were of him. They looked at one another and got to their feet and started after George. The old woman screamed.

The eyes of the first youth to come at George changed again when he realized he was in a narrow aisle, and could expect no immediate help. He was a boy of average size and strength, a little taller than George, sixteen or seventeen years

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old. His face was just a bit too broad to be called handsome, and his red hair was cut so short the top of his head looked bald. His cohort, mumbling obscenities, shoved forward behind him, pushing him to the attack, until there was nothing he could do but lunge at George, swinging his fists in clumsy desperation.

The bus driver was thinking, as well as watching in the mirror. At that moment he tapped his brakes firmly, risking a bang from the vehicle following, but stalling the momentum of the single-file attack.

George saw the first blow of the fight coming at him, and ducked just enough to catch it on top of the head, where an enemy knuckle was likely to be cracked. Then he leaned forward counterpunching, just as the sudden slowing of the bus rocked the enemy back on their heels. George could already crack two centimeters of pine with either hand. The foe went down like helpless dummies, tangled with one another as they fell. George pressed forward, hammering at the face and body of the unfortunate youth who had led the attack, getting him down and keeping him down so that the rest were jammed and pinned behind him and beneath him.

WHEN the police came aboard, only a couple of minutes after the bus had reached an emergency bay, they found George still leaning on the pile of inept apes, punching anything that dared to move. The police heard Ann's matter-of-fact story, and the driver's, and the stories of the passengers who had noticed anything happening. George was identified and allowed to go his way; the five were removed to a police copter. The red-bald youth had to be carried, and his face was now far from handsome. George had a moment of sick regret, but no more than a moment, on seeing the damage he had done.

As soon as the police had departed with their catch the bus got rolling again and Ann's reaction started to set in. Her hands were trembling and she had to fight back tears. She understood, probably from experience, that they would have done more than just wrap her in a plastic sheet. And the children riding with her were still in a slight state of shock, sitting quietly and staring at her and George.

George sat down at her side and acknowledged her choking thanks. He now felt ten feet tall, and at the same time shaky with relief. "Relax, it's all over now," he said to Ann. He patted her arm, and slid a hand beneath her long skirt, gently squeezing her thigh.

"Please don't," she murmured, shifting away from him, pressing her knees firmly together.

His quieting pulse speeded up again at her withdrawal. But he

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couldn't believe she had meant that just the way it sounded. Probably it wasn't really the open invitation it sounded like, but just a nervous reaction from the danger she had been in. A lot of people just didn't feel like sex when they were frightened or upset, and under the circumstances her lack of even a polite pretense was quite forgivable.

So he restricted himself to holding Ann's hand, and lightly stroking her arm, which attentions she accepted and seemed to find comforting. "I think I know you," he said with sudden mild surprise. "At least I know who you are. Your name's Ann something, and you're in my sister's high school class. You were there at school one day with a bunch of girls when I went to pick her up. She's Rita Parr. Oh, excuse me, my name is George."

"Yes, I heard you giving it to the police. I'm Ann Lohmann. Oh, why must I start blubbering now, when the trouble's all over?" She was certainly not blubbering, just a little tense and swollen-looking about the eyes. "Thanks to you." Getting herself completely under control, Ann looked around to her children, giving them a smile and a few cheerful words, snapping at a boy to get his feet down off the seat.

"Where are you taking them?" George asked.

"We're just coming back from Bear Canyon Park. I took them out there because so many never see anything but pavement and little strips of grass." The kids all had a BI look. "They're from my Sunday School class."

"Oh, one of those religious schools?"

"Yes." There was a pause. "I remember seeing you, too, now that I think about it. Rita looks a lot like you."

He laughed. "Don't say that about the poor girl. She's all excited about graduation these days. So are you, I suppose."

"Yes, we all are, I guess." But Ann was evidently not nearly as excited as Rita was.

"And about going to college. Where are you going your freshman year, if you don't mind my asking?"

"How could I mind *your* asking anything?" Ann smiled beautifully. She was really quite a good-looking girl. "I might go to Mid-Cal my first year. Or maybe Ha-Levy Junior. I'm not sure."

George also liked this girl's voice, now that he had a chance to listen to it attentively. Girls' voices were important, in his estimation. So were their tempers and spirits. If there was a suggestion of repression in Ann's clothes and manner, well, that was an attractive spice for him. He hadn't yet seen her standing up, but he guessed that she would be no taller than he was. That, too, was nice.

"You're older than Rita, aren't you?" Ann was asking. "Well,

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naturally you are. Where did you go to college, or are you still going?"

"I didn't go." Not wanting her to think him lazy or stupid, he quickly added: "Oh, I may go yet. But the year I finished high school there was one problem after another in our family, people getting sick and losing jobs and all. We were almost back on BI. I didn't have much time or money, and I was a little too dumb to qualify for any good scholarships. Then I got into this karate business. Once you get your black belt, it's really a profession."

Ann looked at him warmly. "I can't imagine that you're lacking in intelligence. Anyway, you've proved that you have courage, that's more important." She shook her head as if marveling. "When you stood up there in the aisle, I didn't know what you were going to do. But I knew that you knew."

Unable to find the words to answer that, George changed the subject. "I suppose you're all excited about the Prom? Rita is. She's got her escort all picked out and everything. I don't know if the poor clod knows about it yet."

Once more Ann seemed to withdraw for a moment, as she had when he caressed her leg. "I'm not going to the Prom," she said, then busied herself suppressing a quarrel that had been developing among the children.

George supposed that she had been having a quarrel with her best boy friend, and was uncertain about who her escort was going to be. He never doubted that a girl like this would have a choice of invitations to accept. "I'll bet you change your mind about that," he said, thinking back to the closing of his own high school days. "The Prom's half the fun of graduating, or more than half."

She didn't answer. But *surely* a girl like this had been invited, so he could push and tease and probe a little more without seriously hurting any feelings. "Why," he said, "I'd be tempted to ask you myself, if I was in your class."

"I've been asked." Ann face was slightly averted so he could not make out her expression, but her voice was unhappily chilly. "I'm just not going."

Ouch. He had managed to hit a real sort spot after all. "Anyway," he said, "your Prom isn't next week. You have lots of time to think about it. Meanwhile, when am I going to see you again?"

IT TURNED out that he saw her next day, at the police station where they had both been summoned for questioning about the fight on the bus. George came near being charged with aggravated battery, but when the testimony of all the available witnesses had been heard, he was not charged.

Later George bought Ann a snack in a nearby restaurant, and

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then suggested they find some place a little less noisy and copulate.

"No, please, I'd rather not." Again her reply was blunt and seemed to amount to an open invitation to repression. But at the same time her answer seemed so natural and direct, so unembarrassed, that he simply could not take it at face value. He told himself that she had probably been upset all over again by having to testify. She was so matter-of-fact about what she said that she probably didn't realize how it sounded.

He asked her several times to go out with him on a regular date, but she consistently refused. Still, he contrived to see more of her. His sister Rita told him where Ann could usually be found on Monday nights, playing volleyball, and he went to the gym and managed to get in on some of the games.

"Annie, this is fun, but how about you and me going out someplace by ourselves? You like other sports? Bowling, swimming? Or maybe a show."

"George, I . . . you're nice, and I really like you, but I think it wouldn't be wise."

"Why not?" But now people were yelling at them to get back to the net if they wanted to play. They never had the time or the place for a serious discussion. Ann seemed to be making sure of that.

During this same period of a month or so George made it a point to enjoy sex with five or six different girls. With each, at the most abandoned moments, he found himself closing his eyes and imagining that it was Ann Lohmann's flesh that moved against his own. The popularizers of psychology on television and in the newsprints were always warning that such behavior could be a danger signal. To focus lust on one individual might be a step toward its repression whenever that individual was not available. Brilliant, thought George. It was just staggering how smart those college educated psychologists could be. Anyway, he wasn't worried. A lot of the younger, more radical psychologists held that sexual repression, or all-out sublimation even, did no permanent harm when practiced occasionally. That seemed sensible to George, though he hadn't much personal experience to judge by. He was young and full of health and usually wanted to do nothing with his sex but satisfy it every day or so and enjoy thinking about it in between times.

But now this thing with Ann—this thing with Ann was something else.

Early on the evening of the Prom—living in the same house as Rita, he could not possibly have gotten the date wrong—he obeyed an irrational-seeming impulse and phoned Ann's home. Ann's mother, tight-lipped and looking somehow hurried and harried, answered. When he asked for Ann,

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she reminded him in a nervous voice that this was Prom night. Still he noticed that she did not say in so many words that Ann had already left for the Prom, or that she was too busy getting ready for it to come to the phone.

After he had blanked off, George sat thinking. Then he went to Rita's room, where his sister was still being fitted into her Prom gown, meters and meters of fuzzy pink transparency. While their mother was out of the room looking for implements or materials of some kind, he took the opportunity to question his sister.

"I really don't know whether she's going tonight or not, George. How does this look in the back?"

"Fine."

"She's an honest girl and a good friend of mine and I love her dearly. If she said someone has asked her, then someone has. Also, if she said she's not going, then that's the way it will be. I love her dearly, as I said, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if she doesn't go. Oh, George, what do you mean it looks fine? I can tell in the mirror that it's terrible."

He wasn't looking into the mirror, or at the dress.

Ineluctably motherly even on her Prom night, Rita came over to him, frowning with concern. "Oh, George, is it really getting serious between you two?"

"It is for me, although I've never even screwed her once. Is she always—like that? You know?"

Rita was worried now, completely distracted from her dress. "I might as well tell you bluntly, Ann has a bad rep with the boys in the class. I mean *I'm* not the most prudish and old-fashioned girl, but *she* is really way out." Rita glanced at the bedroom door to determine whether their mother was still out of earshot. "You know she's been excused from Erotic Orientation classes all along, on religious grounds. Don't get me wrong, she's been my loyal friend ever since sophomore year."

"No, I didn't know that about no EO. But it's not really surprising."

"You say you've never screwed her. If you ask me, no one has." Rita nodded significantly. "I mean it. She's my friend, but you're my brother. I've seen a lot of the boys displaying a certain *interest* in her, if you know what I mean. And more than one man teacher, too. Well, if she hardly ever lets them see anything between her shoulders and her knees, I suppose the men are bound to get the message and come sniffing around. I guess you know what you're doing."

Rita was still looking at him worriedly when their mother returned and George withdrew. A deep excitement was now taking control of him. It had begun on that first day on the bus and had been developing ever since. He went back to his own room and spent half an hour alternately lying

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on the bed, pacing, and practicing his side snap kick before the mirror. Meanwhile, he fought an inner struggle, understanding that the whole course of his future might be altered here and now. Again and again he told himself to put dark ideas out of his mind and phone some other girl with whom he could joyfully and simply spend the night in bed. Then he gave up and started to punch out Ann's phone number again. Then he gave that up too and headed for her house.

THE house was all in darkness and he almost stumbled over a small figure sitting on a step in front of the door before he realized that anyone was there. Taking a second look, George saw that it was a boy about ten years old, who held in his hands a carved wooden figure about half as tall as he was.

"You live here?" George asked, his hand hesitating over the call-plate on the door.

"Yeah," said the boy. "Nobody's home but my sister," he added gloomily.

George's heart gave a little premonitory throb. "It's her I want to see." He touched the plate and immediately a light came on above his head, giving the TV eye in the door a chance for a good look.

In the new light George could see that the carved wooden figure in the boy's hands was—or had been—a female nude, executed with some skill. The kid was slowly mutilating it now, moodily gouging and hacking it with a small knife. The step was littered with little chips and shavings.

"Hey, what're you doing that for?"

"I carved it, I can do what I want."

"Well. What's your name?"

"Fred."

"I'm George. You can carve pretty good, Fred, if you did that. Why don't you save it?" Though it seemed too late for that. Now one of the house's windows came alight; someone was on their way to answer the door.

"Oh, you're karate-George from the bus." The boy looked up with interest for a moment, but then lowered his brown head again and dug in with the knife. "Why should I save it? Nobody wants to look at it."

Ann opened the door, rubbing her dark hair with a towel. She was wearing a translucent pinkish sarong, not radically concealing, with apparently nothing under it. "Hello, George. Freddy! I thought you were at the Scout meeting. What are you doing, *destroying* that?"

"Nobody cares about it."

"*I* care. I told you I like to see anything you do—"

"You don't know nothin' about it. And nobody else cares." Freddy flung down the chunk of wood and was gone running into the night,

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across the little front yard and then swallowed up by the shadows along a narrow statwalk beside a slow river of taillights.

Ann called after her brother in annoyance, but evidently without any real expectation that he would turn around and come back. She made a gesture of resignation and then turned. "Come in, George." It was almost as if she had been expecting him.

"Thanks. Is your brother going to be all right?"

"Oh, I suppose so. I think he'll stay in the neighborhood. Anyway I don't know what I can do."

George daringly omitted giving her any slightest pinch or caress of greeting, even on the hand or arm, as he stepped into the house. True to form, Ann did not blush or giggle at the omission, as most of the girls he knew would probably have done, nor did she take offense at it, as the really nice conservative ones might. A bad girl then, as Rita had warned him, and all the signs so plainly showed. But still . . . somehow he couldn't believe she was.

"Let's go out beside the pool," she said. "It's nice outside tonight."

"All right." He followed her through the house. "I called earlier, and your mother sort of implied you were going out, but I just had a hunch and came on over anyway."

"I'm glad you did." As they were leaving the indoors for a palm-fringed patio Ann stopped and turned to him. Her gladness, if such it was, was quiet and almost melancholy. "My parents have gone to the Prom, they agreed to be chaperones. They were very upset when they found they couldn't talk me into going, even going at the last minute with them instead of a boy taking me. My mother is Church of Eros, you know, quite devout, and she's been going there for guidance day after day and trying to get me to go. But her church and mine just don't agree. My father went to his playclub and talked to the philosopher. Finally my parents both decided they ought to do what's expected of them even if I won't. So they're chaperoning. I guess that's partly why Freddy is upset. He thought Dad might go with him tonight to some Scout meeting." It was about the longest speech that George had ever heard from her. She seemed farther from melancholy when she had gotten it out.

"I'm glad your parents decided that way," said George. "Now I have you all to myself."

"I'm glad you do. I had to talk a little bit to someone." Ann stopped rubbing her hair and let the towel hang down in front of her. She seemed innocently unconscious of the concealing effect. Now for the first time she smiled. "Would you like a swim, George? I just climbed out."

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"Sounds like fun." He followed her around the bend of the L-shaped patio to the pool, which was irregular in shape and fairly small, and bordered along most of its perimeter by plastic grass and probably artificial flowers. His mind pictured Ann climbing from the pool, slipping on her sarong, going to answer the door. Suddenly he was sure she had been swimming in the nude, and his inward excitement—if excitement was really the right word for this chilling thing—went up another reading on the dial. Of course there was no sensible reason why a girl alone should not slip off her bikni and swim nude if she wanted to. Only the most satyrish reactionaries would insist that a solitary person wear clothes to emphasize his or her sex. But still the mental picture of Ann floating alone, smooth as a snake, divorced from sex, all chaste and bare as a lily-pad, was overwhelming.

"Still, the air is getting a little cool now," said George, stalling. Standing beside her on the edge of the pool, he felt very unsure of himself. Would she laugh at him for an old-fashioned clod if he mentioned his lack of a swimming codpiece? On the other hand, if he just stripped bare and dove in, would she, after all, be shocked? In spite of the evidence of her own words and actions he couldn't really believe that she was the bad kind of girl. But hadn't he come here tonight hoping she was, trying to prove it, wanting to get from her what only bad girls gave? Confused as a sixteen-year old, he chickened out.

"You're right," she said calmly. "I wasn't in the pool for very long."

They sat down side by side on the pool's curved grassy edge, and George pulled off his sandals and dipped his feet into the water. In his knitted translucent shorts and jacket he was really quite warm enough, but he saw Ann shiver just slightly in her sarong with the damp towel around her bare shoulders. In a minute he would suggest that they go back inside where it was warmer. Meanwhile he wanted to watch her as she stirred the water gently with one toe, scattering a thousand California stars.

ONLY ONCE, as an adolescent in the grip of a way-out mood, had George visited a brothel. There a pretty girl had draped herself while he watched, and had talked about stars and purity and poetry and other high, mysterious things until she had him sexless as a mushroom. Then he and the girl had lain chastely side by side on her narrow bed and talked. Between other topics of conversation he tried to explain the mental processes of karate to her, how the mind could concentrate the body's force sufficiently to drive the hand uninjured through a wooden slab. At the time

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he had not really started any serious study of karate, and so he had been facile with explanations.

Probably his dissertation hadn't made too much sense, but the girl was a skilled listener. He supposed most whores were that, and sexually desirable, too. He had heard Japanese speculating about what the old-time geisha must have been like, and he wondered if they were something similar. In the brothel George had never forgotten how desirable the girl with him was, while at the same time his mind had daringly pushed lust farther and farther away. A door had opened for him to a bittersweet world of controlled power. Change the metaphor: free-style sparring, and Eros's feet of fleshy clay were swept out from under him, and down he came with a great ignominious gonad-jarring crash, to be made to bend his neck before a single rebellious human slave.

Still, when it was all over, when his half hour was up and he was being expertly shown the door, he found himself somewhat disappointed. Was this all that sublimation ever amounted to? It hardly seemed worth the fuss that people made about it.

Now, sitting with Ann on the grassy rim of the pool, he watched a movement of her hips show through the sarong as she shifted her weight slightly, and felt a sudden physical surge of desire for her. He remembered suddenly that he had seen and responded to just such a movement of the prostitute's body as she began to wrap herself before him.

"So. I guess you're still working with that Sunday school religious class, hey?"

"Oh, yes. When I have time."

"Have you belonged to that Christian group long? I mean, guess the rest of your family aren't members."

"It's a Christian school, but . . ." Ann spoke slowly and carefully now. "I'm not actually baptized into the Church yet myself. I just help out there. I've been hanging around the school and church there since I was about thirteen. You're right, my parents are much against it and of course they try to argue me out of ever being baptized. I guess my adolescence has been difficult for them, with me always hanging around Sunday school instead of going to young peoples' orgies in their church. The philosopher at Daddy's playclub says I'm looking for a crutch to help me get through life. And really it is such a tremendous step, being baptized, I mean. In a sense I'm still free now to do anything I want, but after baptism I won't be."

"Hm."

"For example I'll be practically restricted to marrying someone who's also a Christian. If I get married at all."

"Really?"

"Well, I just mean it takes an awful lot of work to make a mar-

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riage a success even when the two partners agree on the important things such as religion. And my marriage will have to succeed because Christians don't have divorce, or at least not very often."

"Aren't they divided into a bunch of splinter sects? I was reading about it the other day." George had rarely given the subject of religion much thought, but just recently he had been reading up a bit on Christianity. He didn't think it was for him. He couldn't figure out whether violence was ever allowed or not. Maybe it was something like the traditional rules of karate, where you weren't allowed to use it for real unless to protect yourself or another loved one.

"Christians used to be divided. Now they're pretty much reunited again, what's left of them."

"Well, I never even go to Church of Eros any more. I think religion's not for me. They say that some of those churches, once you join them they never let you alone again afterwards."

After a little silence Ann said: "There are a number of things that never let you alone."

"Yes," agreed George, wondering just what things she had in mind.

"George?" Her voice was different.

"What?"

"Would you like to have sex with me? Here and now?"

"Why, yes," he answered, speaking mechanically in his surprise. "That would be nice."

FOR LONG seconds she did not reply. She sat there so motionless that her toes no longer troubled the starry water. George tried to read her face in the near-darkness. Then abruptly she turned her face away. "The way you say that!" Ann said, and made a frightened, twisted sound that was a little like a laugh.

"It's just that you took me by surprise." George slid closer to her along the side of the pool. "Oh, Ann. Annie? You've never wanted me to give you an erotic touch before."

"Oh," she said, "I've wanted." She leaned away from him, supple and graceful in her sarong. Her toes left the water with a tinkle of tiny drops, and she stretched out on her back along the edge of the pool. Now she covered her eyes with one slender wrist.

George could no longer control himself. He crept very close and bent over Ann, daring not to touch her at all. "Don't be afraid," he said.

"I'm not afraid, I'm not ashamed." Her voice was surprisingly firm and proud, and she was watching him from under her arm. "You don't know me very well, George. But maybe you've heard some stories."

"Yes I have. But I don't care if

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the stories are true."

"What do they say about me, the stories that you don't care about?"

"They say—" His voice went shaky on him and he had to pause. "What they amount to is that you're still a virgin."

She moved her arm away and now he could see her face in the starlight, her face becoming calmer now with an inner change, the blooming of some beauty that George could not have named. "Yes." She said it without a trace of shame. "That's why I'm not at the Prom tonight. Nothing but one long orgy. George, just now I offered you my virginity. Can you understand what that means to me?"

Watching her, listening to her, he thought he could. As if following some biological imperative his lust now began to recede, while at the same time there rose up in him—something else. His throat ached with his joy. He straightened up so that he was no longer bending over Ann but sitting at her side.

Looking at him steadily, she asked again: "Now, do you want to have sex with me?"

"Yes. Sometime. Right now I want—something more."

Ann nodded agreement and lowered her eyes. Her breathing, that had quickened momentarily, now grew slow. In a gentle voice she asked: "Shall I take this sarong thing off? Or put on something thicker?"

George could not find his voice to answer right away. What had happened in the brothel had afforded him an enjoyable, way-out kick, a fancy kind of reverse mental tickle. That tremendous gulfs of experience lay beyond had been suggested, but no more. In itself the visit to the whore had been not quite worth the effort to repeat it. This thing impending now, beginning now, was going far beyond. A winged thing had been born inside his chest and it was lifting at the roots of his being, lifting and pulling and expanding until it seemed that sex itself might be dissolved out of the flesh and carried outward to the stars.

"Oh, I don't care what you wear," George groaned in a failing voice. "Oh, I love you, love you, love you. Oh, sublimation's such a dirty word, there has to be a better."

"I know," Ann whispered. "Don't talk now." She had done this before. He was the virgin here.

Their hands came together and held, now just human hands more than they were male-female. She raised her eyes to his, and then on past his eyes, and he knew that she was looking at the stars. No turning back now. Never. They rose on the great lifting wings.

X

WAKING up, rejoining the inhospitable world, was a slow

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and intermittent and instinctive struggle. Art understood from the beginning of the struggle that he was sick, or hurt, and paradoxically this left him less worried than he had been before. Before whatever had happened to leave him in this state. He was less worried because now less would be expected of him. They would have to take care of him now.

. . . they? Someone was trying. However he had come to be here, he lay in a bedroom in somebody's home. In one of the two beds crowded into the small and cheaply furnished chamber. He had the vague impression of somebody having been in the other bed, and the covers there were rumped, but now when he looked carefully there was no one. Perhaps, too, somebody had once shared this bed with him. He should have been polite and pawed at their genitals at least but right now he felt tired of genitalia and thank Eros he was sick or hurt and nothing much could reasonably be expected of him along that line.

. . . should have grabbed and pawed as those little plastic figures were doing to each other, those cheap Church of Eros icons that someone had shoved to the rear of the top of that high plastic wardrobe over there and then forgotten.

It was a BI bedroom from the look of it, or could it be a room in a cheap hotel? Or some rented room where tenant after tenant rushed through, forgetting and leaving things, and none of the haphazard objects in the room fit with anything else. There on the wall was the founder of Christianity nailed up, as in Ann's children's room, but here two pieces of plastic were doing the job instead of wooden beams. And there on the other wall, a reproduction of a painting that looked like a Caravaggio, but a Caravaggio that Art had never seen before. Nothing like Eros trampling the violin, or Bacchus lounging amid bowls of fruit. In this picture there were men around a table doing something, counting money, and on the right two men entering, one of them important, a mysterious figure of light and shadow and power, extending a hand that said: here, *you*, enough of playing with those trifles on the table, more important things are waiting. The summons had come, and everyone in the picture knew about it except the man for whom it was intended.

. . . so he himself was sick, no, he was hurt, for now he remembered something about being frightened out there in the street, and now there was this sexawful pain in his head that only intermittenly would go away. And now truly there was a long-haired girl resting, indecently covered, in the room's other bed, and now, whup, a trick of the illusionist's art and she was gone again. Meanwhile it might have been that Art had slept.

Standing before him was a man,

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tall and narrow-shouldered, with a sandy beard and impressive green or gray or blue eyes, it was hard to tell because the color seemed to change, who looked at Art intently. And this man was a somewhat familiar figure, because he had been standing in the same place an hour ago (a day ago?) and asking Art some questions.

"What's your name?" the man asked now, looking at Art intently. He had a mild, slow voice that contradicted a look in his eyes of being fierce and concentrated and somehow ready to pounce.

"ARTHUR Rodney?

The man smiled and nodded, as if this were very good news indeed. He had shut the door of the room behind him; outside somewhere in the background printout was clacking noisily from a computer terminal in need of mechanical adjustment. "Art, what year is this?" Art's second correct answer was just as satisfying as his first. "How do you feel, Art?"

"Not good. I've got a triplet of a headache." All of a sudden the lobby of Family Planning came back, and then the frantically waving picket signs outside, the jam of bodies on the statwalk. What should come after that? He didn't know. He had reached a real blank.

The man stepped closer to his bed. "Let's have a look at that." With what were unmistakably a doctor's hands, professionally sure and gentle, he probed through or around some kind of dressing on Art's scalp.

"Ouch."

"Sorry. Well, that's not looking too bad. And I'm glad you've waked up fully now." The man stepped back, pulling at a curl of sandy beard. "But I still want to make an X-ray or two. Haven't been able to as yet."

"How long have I been here? And where am I, anyway?"

"You've been here several hours. Let's say you're with some people who gave you shelter when it appeared to them that otherwise you'd go to jail. May I ask—what is the last thing you remember clearly?"

Art closed his eyes. His head throbbed. "Coming out into the street, in front of the Family Planning building. There was some kind of demonstration, or riot . . . but why should I have gone to jail?"

The doctor shrugged and gave a tiny smile. "I don't know that you would have. Some of the Young Virgins on the scene evidently mistook you for one of their own casualties and brought you here. Some of them think that if a person gets clobbered in the street he must be a good guy, and anyone who's a good guy is automatically in danger of being thrown in jail."

He approached Art again, and with the aid of a tiny light looked

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closely into his eyes.

"How am I doing, doctor?"

"Not bad, not bad. Rest. It's important that you take it easy for a while. Don't worry about a thing. I'll be back in a bit."

When the door had closed behind the doctor Art lived in silence for a while with the pain in his head, alternately opening and closing his eyes. Somewhere in the distance the faulty computer terminal clacked away again. The room had one small window with bright daylight coming in around the edges of a closed shade. This was some Young Virgins' refuge, then. But he was not back in the Diana Arms; at least, Rita's room had looked very little like this one.

The door opened and a girl in a long, opaque sweater came in, bringing him a cup of something warm and chocolatey to drink, and Art was abruptly conscious of being entirely naked beneath the bedsheet.

"Medicine?" he asked, while routinely starting to put a hand up under the bottom of her sweater.

"No." She gave him a cool smile and turned away, so that his hand slid free. "Just a drink. Thought you might like some."

She went out again right away. The stuff in the cup tasted good. Soon he might try getting up. He wondered if his clothes, and his watch and his money, were in the plastic wardrobe, and he wondered what time of day it was. About the time he had finished the drink, sipping slowly, the doctor was back.

HE LOOKED in Art's eyes again with his little light and then pulled up a chair and sat. "Art, I took the liberty of going through your wallet while you were unconscious. Just to see if there was a record of anything, diabetes or allergies or so forth, that might bear on your medical condition."

"No doubt I owe you thanks for taking care of me. And you found out my name. I didn't catch yours."

No answer.

"I suppose now I had better get up and put on my clothes and leave."

"I don't want to scare you, Art, but before you go walking out on the street I must insist we take some X-rays. I hope to be able to make them downstairs here in just a few minutes. If X-rays show no skull fracture we can drive you home right away, take you anywhere in the city you want to go. If they do show a fracture we are going to have to *somehow* arrange to move you on a stretcher to a hospital."

"I—see. Or maybe I don't."

"The point is that your presence puts us here in something of an awkward position. If you do have a fracture, we can't simply call an ambulance to come and get you.

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And for your own good I wouldn't want you riding folded down and blindfolded in the back seat of a car."

"I know how that works," Art muttered, feeling a little sick.

"Beg your pardon?"

"Nothing. Evidently I'm in some kind of a—secret hideout."

The doctor looked relieved. "I'm glad you understand. It's quite important to a number of us here that the location of this house be kept a secret. And we've realized by now that you're no sympathizer of ours. Nevertheless we wish you well. We don't want to—to make you feel you're being held a prisoner. As soon as the X-ray film I need arrives, which I hope will be any minute now, we'll take a couple of pictures and then you'll be on your way."

Art relaxed wearily in the bed. "All right, all right. I guess you know what you're doing."

"I'm *really* glad you're being understanding about this, Art. I feel a personal responsibility in this matter. For your being in the Family Planning office to begin with, I mean."

Art looked at him, trying to puzzle it out.

"You see, I'm Rita's midwifer."

A COUPLE of sturdy male Young Virgins came along shortly, pushing a regular hospital cart. They got Art's clothes out of the wardrobe—he noticed the strap of his watch sticking out of a pocket, and also the faint bulge of a billfold that had evidently been scrupulously replaced—and helped him put on his codpiece and loaded him onto the card beneath an opaque sheet. Meanwhile, of course, he was demanding again and again to be told where his wife was.

"She's not here, not in this building," the doctor kept answering him calmly. "The parturition will be quite soon. She's well. And she's worried about you—more precisely, as I interpret what she says, she's worried about whether you'll want her back when she has her third child."

It took Art a moment to understand. "You mean she thinks I might divorce her? But that's foolish, how would that help? It wouldn't help her or the children, and it certainly wouldn't help me." He lay on his back with his head on a low pillow as the two husky Virgins propelled the cart out of the room and along a rambling hallway, through what appeared to be an ancient house of mansion size, or else perhaps the rundown dormitory of some private school. Not at all like the Diana Arms. "Sure, I hope she doesn't have a third baby when she comes back. But even if she does, I most certainly want her. So, you're the one who's doing it. How can you interfere in people's lives like this? How much are you being paid?"

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The doctor was walking beside the cart, now and then going ahead or falling behind when the way became too narrow. "I'm not getting a dollar from Rita or anyone in her family. If she's paid out money it must be going to the doctor who referred her to me, or to someone else along the line. In a clandestine business like this you're always going to get some people going into it for the money."

"And you?"

"For the good of my immortal soul. That's how I see it. That I have an inescapable moral duty to do what I am doing here."

The cart rolled into a small, old-looking elevator. The two orderlies remained behind as the doors closed and the elevator started down with Art still lying on the cart and the doctor standing beside it.

"You don't inspire a great deal of confidence, doctor. If you are a doctor, really. If you're not you'd better keep your hands off my wife."

"I assure you I am an obstetrician. And you'll be glad to hear that I haven't lost a mother in some years of practice." The slow descent of the elevator stopped and the doors slid open. "I haven't lost anyone to a head injury, either. But then yours is about the first I've treated since I was an intern." And with that the cart was rolling again.

The opaque sheet came over Art's face in two thicknesses as they left the elevator. The voice of his captor said: "I'm covering your eyes up here, so you won't be able later to identify or locate this house."

Art only grunted. He felt the cart jolt lightly over a threshold, and then there came a whiff of outside air, summer-warm and fragrant, but he stoically refused to look or listen or sniff for clues. Once before he had been granted knowledge that secretive guides were trying to withhold from him, and knowledge had done him no good at all. This game was hopeless, for him at any rate, and he was about ready to give it up. Not to accept that his opponents were in the right, but to admit that they had him beaten. The law and the bulk of society were on his back but he could not call them in. When you went into the endgame a rook down and your clock running out, maybe you had better resign and save some mental energy for the next game. There would be a lot of tough games to play against the world when Rita came home again, whether or not she had to go to jail first or not. If she went to jail who was he going to get as a steady, dependable baby-sitter in California?

Now the cart was on a descending ramp. Impossible to judge whether it went down one meter or three. When it stopped and the doctor pulled the sheet down from Art's face, the two of them were alone in a kind of laboratory or treatment room crowded with a

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jumble of shelves and boxes and equipment, lighted by some old-fashioned overhead fluorescents. The windowless walls were lined nearly from floor to ceiling with shelving, loaded with boxes and bottles labeled in what seemed to be the jargon of medical technology. The nearby door through which they had evidently just entered was now closed. It was hard to guess the size of the room because sections of it to both right and left were cut off by portable white screens.

"Now where is the damned film?" The doctor was ruffling through stacks of papers, journals, printouts, and other impedimenta that covered a large desk-like metal table. "They told me that they left it here." Somehow the archaic swearword, the like of which Art had not heard since the tridi play went dead on the tube train, sounded natural coming from this man.

After fruitlessly searching a few moments longer, the doctor muttered an excuse and went out impatiently, closing the door of the room behind him. Art heard another door open and close some distance off.

Apart from his continuing headache, he now felt pretty good. Good enough to have a sense of awkwardness and vague shame at lying here on a cart like an invalid. He raised himself on an elbow and looked about. There on the foot of the cart were his clothes. Should he dress and stagger out into the street, calling for the police? That certainly wouldn't win Rita over to his point of view. No, he had tipped his king and resigned the game.

Near at hand he recognized a portable X-ray machine, a familiar sight from visits to other physicians' offices. An unobtrusive background hum of electric power and electronics permeated the room. And now he became aware of another sound, an old-fashioned watch tick-tick-ticking, except this was a little faster and more irregular than a watch would be.

Still alone, Art swung his feet over the side of the cart and sat up. His head ached, but he felt able to stand and walk. Now if that was a bathroom over there, as a tiled interior glimpsed beyond the top of a white screen seemed to promise, then his physical comfort might soon be brought back close to normal. He slid off the cart and walked around the screen, past glassy tanks and a maze of piping and a portable computer terminal set up on a dimly lighted workbench, and found the hoped-for toilet.

He was on his way back to sit on his cart like a good patient when, just rounding the shadowed workbench, he came to a full stop. "Ah," he said aloud.

The fetus was in the central glassy tank atop the bench . . .

TO BE CONTINUED

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SCIENCE FACT

A STEP FARTHER OUT

JERRY POURNELLE

BLACK HOLES AND COSMIC CENSORSHIP

As I write this, California courts are trying to decide whether the police have the power to seize copies of the film "Deep Throat" and my friend Earl Kemp may be headed for jail due to violation of censorship laws. Thus I'm tempted to write about censorship. But since this is a science column and not a political essay I don't suppose I'll be able to.

However, one should never underestimate the ingenuity of a columnist . . . .

I SUPPOSE, though, I'd better stay with science and cosmology. I've just got the latest on gravitation research; that seems like a good safe topic. I mean, how far from censorship can you get?

I expect most *Galaxy* readers are at least vaguely aware of the ongoing research on detection of gravitational waves, but it won't hurt to summarize a bit. In the Newtonian universe, and in many other theories as well, gravity is a "force" that acts through a field. That is, these theories postulate that although gravity is 10:40 times weaker than electromagnetism, it is not fundamentally different.

This essential similarity holds true in the realm of special relativity also. Special relativity, you'll recall, states that no material object and no signal can travel faster than light. There's a good bit of evidence for special relativity, and no really good counter-theory lurking in the wings to take its place.

The *general* theory of relativity, however, is another breed of cat entirely. There are several contenders in that realm, and experimental evidence offers no clear-cut way to choose one or the other. General relativity does away with gravity fields altogether. In that theory,

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gravity results from the geometry of space.

Whether gravity fields "exist" or merely result from geometry, theorists believe gravitational attraction propagates with the speed of light. Thus, if matter be created—or destroyed—the rest of the universe won't be instantly affected, but must wait until the gravitational effect, traveling at light speed, reaches it.

Thus "gravitation waves", which will have a frequency and an amplitude much like light, but which may also have some rather strange properties as well.

IN THEORY, if we could detect and examine gravitational waves, we might be able to tell whether they result from a field and are thus similar to magnetism, or if they are merely a property of space and its geometry. Unfortunately, gravity is an incredibly weak force. It requires the mass of the whole earth merely to pull things with a puny 980 cm/sec^2 acceleration—and we can overcome that with rather small magnets, or chemical rockets, or even our own muscles when we jump.

Because gravity is so weak, it's hard to play with. You can't turn on a "gravity wave generator" and fiddle with the resulting forces to see if they refract, or can be tuned, or whatever. You can't wiggle a mass to generate gravity waves, because you can't get a large enough mass held into place to be wiggled. It's not even possible to blow off an atomic weapon, turning some matter into energy, and measure the effect of the matter vanishing; the effect is just too small to be noticed, and it's hidden among the rather drastic side effects.

However, there are a number of theoretical ways that gravity waves might be generated by the universe: stars collapsing into black holes or neutronium would do it, for example. The universe might be riddled with gravitational waves, but they'd be terribly weak, and require delicate and sophisticated apparatus to detect them.

Some years ago, Dr. Joseph Weber of the University of Maryland decided to build a gravity wave antenna. He took a large aluminum cylinder and covered it with strain gauges. The idea was that so long as the cylinder were acted on only by the steady gravity of earth, it would be in a stable configuration; but if a gravity wave passed through it, the cylinder would be distorted, and the strain gauges would show it.

He had to compensate for temperature, and isolate it from vibration, and worry about a lot of other things, but the technology had been developed: the antenna was built. It was incredibly sensitive, able to detect distortions on the order of an atomic diameter. It was also able to detect student demonstrations outside the library,

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trucks rumbling along the highway a mile distant, and other unwanted events.

The solution to the latter problem was simple: build another copy of the antenna and place it 1000 kilometers away; now hook the two together, and pay no attention to an event that doesn't affect both. Such "coincidences" should be due to a force affecting both antennae, and since even earthquakes take time to propagate—and their effects move much slower than lightspeed—the output should be reliable.

Unfortunately, it isn't as straightforward as that. The instruments must be very sensitive, and thus there's a lot of chatter from them. By the laws of chance, some of this chatter will be simultaneous, or near enough so, and thus you are guaranteed some false positive results. The output of the gravity wave detectors, therefore, needs careful analysis to decide what's real data and what's chance.

Weber immediately got results. He got a lot of results, far too many for chance. Unfortunately, there were far too many for cosmologists to believe; as a result of Weber's early reports some cosmologists estimated that as much as 98% of the universe must be inside black holes.

The argument went this way: something is producing gravity waves. We can't see enough matter to account for the events, but normal matter falling into a black hole would produce gravity waves. Therefore—

There were other cosmologists who wanted to believe this for different reasons. Readers familiar with black holes must excuse me: it's now necessary to discuss their basics for a moment.

A BLACK hole is a theoretical construct that can be derived from both general relativity and the older Newtonian universe; in fact, the first speculations about black holes come from La Place back in 1798. If you take enough matter and squeeze it small enough, you will eventually get so much gravitational force that nothing can prevent the matter from continuing to collapse.

In Einsteinian terms, the space around the matter becomes curved into a closed figure, but the result is the same: the matter is squeezed to infinite density. Long before it reaches that state, though, there is a region around the matter at which the escape velocity is greater than the speed of light.

The effect of that should be pretty obvious. If light can't escape, you can't see into the hole. Moreover, anything that goes down in the hole stays there: that is, if you accept the speed of light as the top limiting velocity of the universe, nothing can come out, ever.

The area at which space is curved into a closed figure—or the region

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at which the escape velocity is equal to the speed of light—is known as an *event horizon,* and interestingly enough both Newtonian and Einsteinian equations give the same location to it.

It is the region at which:

$$R = \frac{2GM}{c^2} \quad \text{(Equation one)}$$

where R is the radius from the center, G is the universal constant of gravitation, M is mass, and c is the speed of light. For our sun, that radius is on the order of two kilometers: if the sun is ever squeezed that small, we'll never be able to see it again.

An observer diving into the black hole would never know when he had crossed the event horizon. He could continue to send signals to his friends outside, and as far as he could tell, they would go right on up and out.

Those outside the hole, though, can never under any circumstances receive information from inside it.

Now, as it happens, if we measure the total amount of matter in the universe, and plug that in for M in equation one; and we take the furthest object we can observe and plug that in for R; then the equation almost balances.

Almost, but not quite. There isn't enough matter in the universe; we're missing from 20 to 90% depending on whose figures you use for M and R.

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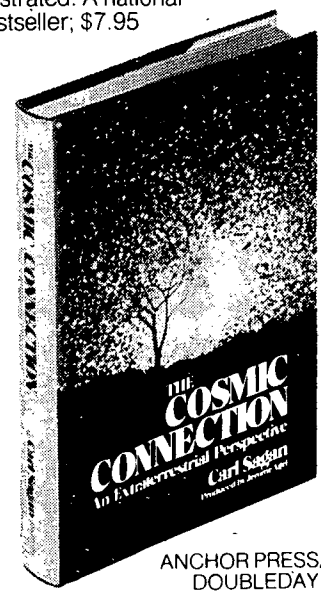

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If the equation were to balance, space would be curved into a closed figure at the boundaries of the universe, and we'd live in a closed universe.

Eventually, in a closed universe, those galaxies receding from us will stop and come back, and the whole universe will be packed into a big wad at the center. What happens after that is debatable, but a number of cosmologists want badly to believe in a closed universe.

It also means, of course, that we live inside a black hole ourselves: that is, our whole universe *is* a black hole.

If we don't live in a closed universe, the receding galaxies will go right on receding, and this disturbs some theorists. Thus, Weber's coincidences were welcome in many cosmological circles. Others tried to build gravitational antennae to confirm his results.

THEN a second startling result came out of Weber's shop. It appeared that there was a 12-hour sidereal cycle to the coincidences, and furthermore, that this cycle was related to the galactic plane. In other words, gravitational waves originated in the galactic center.

We have a good estimate of the distance to the galactic center, and thus were able to estimate how large an effect at the center of the galaxy would be required to deliver that much force to us out here on our spiral arm. The result was once again dismaying. Far too much energy was apparently being turned into gravitational waves.

Now the energy radiating from the galactic center could be either sprayed out in all directions, obeying the inverse square laws, or it could be "beamed" into the galactic plane. Obviously less total energy is involved if it is "beamed", but what mechanism might account for that?

The speculations were many, imaginative, and varied; they were also rather frightening.

LET'S take a moment to go back to black holes. When matter gets dense enough to satisfy equation one, and the event horizon forms, things don't just stop there. The matter goes on collapsing; we just can't see it any longer.

In fact, *nothing* can stop the collapse. In theory, the matter should quite literally become infinite in density. This is a troublesome concept: how can infinite density be present in a finite universe? The answer is obvious: in some respects, the matter no longer remains in the universe at all.

When gravitational forces have got to this point, we have what is known as a "singularity;" a point at which normal laws simply do not apply.

Actually, things are worse than that. Not only don't normal laws apply, but the relativity equations suggest that *no* laws apply. Strange

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things happen in the region of a singularity. Time is reversed. Conservation laws don't work. Causality is a joke: if you could get into the region of a singularity, you really could go back in time and assassinate your grandfather.

In fact anything could happen and science ceases to exist; and you don't even have to physically go to the singularity for this to take place. If you can observe one directly science has just gone down the drain. That bothers a lot of theorists and scientists, and rather disturbs me as well.

If there is a naked singularity—that is, a singularity not covered with an event horizon—then, at least in potential, there is no order to the universe.

Out of that might come ghosties and ghoulies and things that go bump in the night.

WHAT then may we do to save science? Why, invoke censorship, of course. (I told you never to underestimate the ingenuity of a columnist.)

The kind of censorship invoked is called rather whimsically the "Law of Cosmic Censorship", which states that "There shall be no such thing as a naked singularity." *All singularities must be decently clothed with an event horizon.*

Given cosmic censorship, a number of interesting laws about black holes may be demonstrated: that they never get smaller, that if one is rotating it can't be sped up until the escape velocity is smaller than the speed of light, and a number of other rules that are collectively known as the laws of black hole dynamics.

Unfortunately, cosmic censorship deprives science fiction writers of some of their best stories. Hmm. Cosmic censorship is unfair to SFWA . . .

It does it this way. If all black holes are covered with event horizons, it follows that you can't plunge into a black hole and come out elsewhere or elsewhen. Actually, if you plunge into a random black hole, all that could ever come out anywhere would be a stream of undifferentiated subnuclear particles; for all their fantastic properties, singularities do retain one feature, namely that gravitation in their region is rather high, sufficient to disassociate not only the molecular, but the atomic, structure of anything visiting them.

On the other hand, if a star about to collapse into black hole status is rotating fast enough, some solutions to the Einstein tensor suggest that the singularity formed will be a donut; you could dive through that and come out in one piece, provided the donut were large enough.

Large enough means galactic sized, I'm afraid; stellar size black holes will still get you too close to the singularity so that you can't use

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them for transportation. Furthermore, what you come out to on the other side is not, according to the equations, our universe at all. What it will be like, no one can say, except that it will have in it a copy of the black hole you dove through to get there.

So, turn around and dive back, of course; but that doesn't work. You go through and out again, all right, but into a third universe different from either of the other two. The black hole is still there, so try again—and come out in a fourth, and there behind you is that rather tiresome black hole again.

Is any of this real, or are we playing with ideas? No one really knows, of course. The most we can say is that the people who can solve Einstein tensors come up with that kind of result.

It's rather discouraging for science fiction writers. Here we thought we had a new way to get faster than light travel, what with black holes connecting us to another universe, or, just possibly, to another region of our own, and the very people who gave us the black holes go on to prove we can't use them.

Still, maybe there's a way out. Perhaps someone will find a solution. But they can't so long as the law of cosmic censorship is enforced, because singularities decently covered with event horizons can't come out and affect our universe.

BACK to Weber and gravitation waves. One of the models constructed to account for the enormous gravitational energy generated in the center of the galaxy had a very large singularity lurking down there. Suns fell into it, and as they were eaten, gravity waves poured out. It was a rather depressing picture, our galaxy being eaten alive like that.

Then a number of other laboratories constructed gravitational antennae. Bell Laboratories, an English group, the Russians, all made gravity wave detectors. In each case their equipment was supposed to be an improvement on Weber's.

None of them found any coincidences at all. People began to wonder just what Weber had done, and to doubt his results.

Last summer, at the Cambridge Conference of experimental relativists, the picture changed again. The people who had built "improved" gravity wave antennae reported no results whatever.

(Weber continued to report results, but with a change I'll get back to in a moment.)

Meanwhile two other groups, one at Frascatti, Italy, the other at Munich, Germany, had built carbon copies of Weber's antenna. They got coincidences. Whatever Weber was observing, others have independently observed something similar now.

While all this was going on Weber did a re-analysis of his coin-

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cidences—using a computer rather than human judgment to define just what was a coincidence. The result was startling. He still gets events—but they are no longer concentrated in the galactic plane. The sidereal coincidences have gone away, and with them has gone the evidence for the large singularity eating the galaxy.

Moreover, Dr. Robert Forward, of Hughes Research at Malibu, California, has constructed his own gravity wave antenna. Since lasers were invented at Hughes Labs, it's no surprise that Forward's antenna employs them. He has three big weights at the apexes of a right-angle triangle.

Lasers measure the precise distance of each weight from the others. A gravity wave will presumably distort that triangle, and thus be detected.

Forward has "events" too. They seem to coincide with the kinds of things Weber gets but, as I write this, no serious attempt has been made to compare results.

For that matter, the Munich people have just got started. They were quite surprised, by the way; they'd thought Weber's results were some kind of artifact.

IT APPEARS, then, that some kind of gravity waves do travel about through the universe; at least something that can affect large aluminum cylinders hundreds of kilometers apart is operating here.

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The next step is to see if these events have any relationship to those bursts of x-ray energy detected by Vela satellites that I told you about a couple of columns ago. At the moment that's not possible, and of course there are a lot more gravity wave events than x-ray events; but if the x-ray events are accompanied by coincidences on the gravity antenna, we'll know a lot more about both.

We may then be able to decide what gravity is: a force, or a distortion of geometry. We may be able to learn more about black holes, and what happens inside them, and who knows, those trips to alternate universes could be a real possibility.

Until we get rid of cosmic censorship, though, we'll never know what happens to the volunteers who go exploring down black holes. ✱

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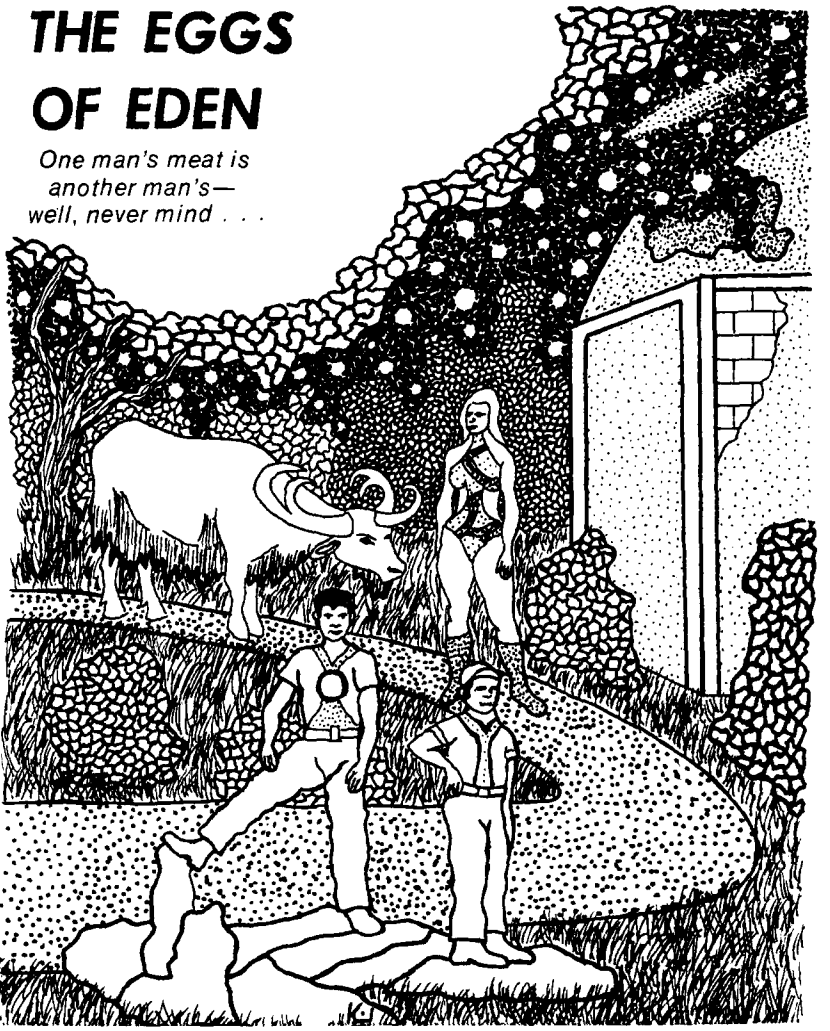
THE EGGS OF EDEN

One man's meat is another man's—well, never mind . . .



M. A. BARTTER

I DIDN'T poison Nadi Belayen. I had both motive and opportunity, and I suppose, if there is still suspicion among us, I'm suspected. And when I watch her guide yet another pubescent class into her bastard shrine, I wish the attempt had succeeded. But I

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didn't put the pseudopear into her stew.

We're too small a group to be constantly afraid of each other, though. Anyone might have been the next victim, if Nadi had died, as we tried to stretch our dwindling food supply. But Nadi threatened our very survival, psychologically as well as physically, and I can't blame whoever tried to put her away. Sometimes I wish it had been me; I might have done a better job . . .

EIGHT OF US manned a small booster station and switchyard on Ingeborg, handling n-space traffic in this end of the Arm. We'd crossed eighteen light-years of space to get here, from the closest transit station then operating, the *in corpora* passage taking six weeks subjective time, and nearly twenty years, relative time. Once here, we dug foundations, assembled the works, set up prestressed shells and topped them with five meters of packed earth, one on each side of a handy drumlin which gave optimum separation of transmitter and receptor. Within a month, plains grass tufted the insulating dirt; four years later, the only visible signs of our presence were the power guidepoles and the conveyer belts like licking metal tongues from pursed, green mouths. This area had glaciated at least once; the solar-still purified water from a stream that snaked through low hills haphazardly dumped across the landscape toward a lake gouged out by some anciently retreating mass. It's purely beautiful; pretty soon we camouflaged everything, trying to pretend we lived on a resort planet with occasional interludes of necessary labor. This was easy to do, since our living quarters were minimal, Ingeborg's weather being on the heavenly-subtropical side, and our station being small, with minimal mechanization. We even shuttled cargo from receptor to transmitter on goosey little fork-lift front-end loaders that zoomed over and around the hills with an excited shriek or an ill-tempered snarl, depending on the driver's mood.

Someday someone would build a reverse station, when rimworld colonies were sufficiently established to ship Homeworldsway, and there'd be more of us here; but we made a pleasantly close and friendly group, and none of us felt the lack of company. Bopp, Garth, Becky, Carol, Mari, Doc, Stew, and myself—all of us experts at practically everything. We respected and supported each other. Some of us were more expert than others, of course. I was particularly handy with an FEL; Bopp could think like the minicomp; Becky could sense receptor load without using meters, and Mari's hand on the directional beam was more accurate than anyone else's. We'd shaken into a unit,

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over the years. No one grudged me my affection for Rags, a native whatnot (no one could really classify it), or Becky's mess of leatherwork, or Doc's persistent inquisitiveness, which added to our bookreels and required our patient answering of his impertinent questions; Doc didn't mean to pry, exactly, he simply had to *know*.

Cargo came through regularly, kicked by a chain of nuclear furnaces, our Ingeborgian sun being merely the nearest, in crates measuring and massing identically to spare the minicomp that adjustment. The only variable factor aside from the contents (which were none of our business, but we always checked invoices anyway) was their destination. We had to 'ping' each shipment, bouncing the beam unloaded through n-space to the designated terminal, computing feedback, and vanishing the crates on toward colony worlds even further down the rim than we were.

The shipment I was shuttling from receptor to transmitter that day was aimed for Salvation, a badly misnamed iceworld, but one judged suitable for colonization. I had the third totcrate balanced on the FEL when the siren howled and the warning light swirled.

Scared? There are no *words* to tell how scared I was. I backed the FEL off, spun the clumsy thing like a dancing bear, and snapped through the multi-gears like grim Death was chasing me.

Somehow I had time to think quite calmly, maybe it's just a short in the warning system, but I'd better leave fast, just in case. And of course, my cargo was precious; they crate children carefully. But if the receptor was about to blow . . .

It blew.

I flew off the seat, smashed against the upper edge of the crate, rose with the blast. Hunks of debris flew about me, traveling at about my speed; I javelined along face down in a more or less flat trajectory. I could see cowering bushes, dust whirling in the FEL tracks, fragmented blossoms I'd stopped to admire on my last trip . . . my last trip . . .

I could pick out individual glass blades. Either I was dropping or the ground was rising. I puzzled over the problem, and finally realized it was both, I'd reached the slope. The perception amused me. I was laughing when I hit.

BOPP WAS bending over me when I woke; the moon was down, but he'd set out glowlux. Ingeborg is way to hellangone down the arm, so the nightsky is mostly ink.

Bopp didn't seem to realize I was awake; I lay quietly for a while, thinking *that's funny, I don't hurt, except my head aches.* Then I thought, *Oh god, I wish I did hurt.*

"I'm dead, man," I said. I meant to whisper, but it roared out of me.

Bopp jumped like a prodded

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cow. Then he steadied, and replied quite calmly, "Not quite, Bud."

"My neck's broken, isn't it?"

"Don't think so. You're still breathing."

He was right. A respirator was one of the luxuries our medikit didn't have; either I was breathing, or I'd discovered a workable substitute.

"Seem to be," I agreed. I was sprawled on the hillside, cradled in that limitless meadow. Bopp hadn't dared move me.

"Is everyone else all right?" I asked finally.

"Garth reached the shelter. Becky didn't." The rest of the crew had been at the transmitter, and were bound to be safe. Unless whatever blew uprooted that, too. But that was unlikely.

"Just Becky?" I sounded quite calm; I was surprised at myself.

"Well, Rags, to."

"Damn." When I'd found him, he'd been quite small, and we didn't have any idea how big he would get; he'd been shaggy, friendly, curious and, fortunately, herbivorous. At his death he'd topped 500 kilos, looking a lot like a flatfooted Terran muskox. We never had solved the question of whether Rags followed me because he'd imprinted on me, or because he just liked the attention. We hadn't made any real study of Ingeborgian ecology; it didn't seem important, once we found the planet was unsuited for colonization.

Ingeborg was hostile. The weather was perennially temperate, the radiation level low, the air just a smidge high in oxygen, the gravity a touch below one g, the fauna friendly and/or harmless . . . but we couldn't eat *anything*. On Ingeborg, *all* the longchain molecules rotated the wrong way. This meant, of course, that we kept a lot of food stockpiled, in case of disaster.

And brother, we'd just had a disaster.

Normal wear-and-tear we could fix, or jury-rig some acceptable repair; but there was no way to replace the entire receptor system. That meant we were out of contact, until an *in corpora* ship could get to us. Without the powergrid on the receptor, we couldn't even ping an SOS to another world. But they'd surely have noticed anything massive enough to blow our station.

Food could be an important problem. Still, with Becky gone, and me . . . I couldn't envision the world without me, but I couldn't convince myself I'd be around . . . at least there would be plenty of food for the survivors.

I could placidly contemplate my own death.

Bopp had certainly injected me with something from shelf six of the medikit, the one that took a second key to open. He'd stuck a needle in my arm, and even though I knew my head was disconnected, the drug had reached my brain. Circulation hadn't yet heard that I was in

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two pieces. If it hadn't noticed, I'd better not think about it, or it might read my mind.

I howled with laughter, screwing my eyes up and roaring breathlessly.

Slowly the spasm passed and the few stars grew fuzzy. Another drug, of course. I'd scared hell out of Bopp.

Then I had a busy little dream. I was back on Charm III, in Totguard Training School; I was practicing guarding tots, but something was wrong. I couldn't see my Trainer anywhere, thirty or forty six-year-olds bulged an undersized room jampacked with playgear, and more kids were coming out of the woodwork. Literally. I watched them wriggle from heatducts, while others went two-dimensional and slithered in between the door jamb and the door. They were three deep on the floor, falling off the swings, perched on the climbing bars, stacked like and with the blocks, and most particularly, festooned all over me.

Everywhere I looked they were snatching toys and smacking each other. I was supposed to control them, nontraumatically. Why were they picking on me?

"We love you, Sissy," they shrilled, pulling my hair, throttling me.

"Be funny, Sissy, be funny, befunny, befunnybefunny," they screamed, swinging on my skirt, twisting my ankles.

"I love you, Sissy," a girlchild cawed, sinking her teeth in my hand.

"EEEyow!" I yelled, snapping my wrist. She sailed lowgrav into the opposite wall, then slowly, slowly slithered down. On the yellow paint a dark-smear of blood glared at me.

They stopped fighting each other. They were all over me, hitting, clawing, biting, breaking . . .

"Up or down?" someone asked.

"What do you say?" That was Bopp.

"She's pretty far down, now."

"Well . . ." Bopp never made a decision if he didn't have to.

The tots were gone, but not far; I could hear screams and shrieks of laughter in the distance.

Where was I? A strange woman's voice, and children . . . not Ingeborg, for sure. But wherever I was, Bopp was there too.

"Up, I think," the woman declared.

"Up," I agreed. My mouth was dry and my tongue thick. I opened my eyes; three daylit Bopps finally settled down to one-and-a-half of him. His square face, lumped by years of offhand reaction to the world, was frowning, but he wasn't looking at me. I switched my gaze—oh, how I concentrated to do that—and there, sure enough, was a stranger.

"Who . . . you?" I croaked. I was still lying on Ingeborg grass. Where had she come from?

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"I'm Nadi Belayen, nurse-attendant-in-transit," she smiled. "I've got you pretty well patched up, I think. You're showing some motor response in your extremities, now. Do you want another dose of . . ."

"No," I interrupted her. If whatever she'd given me had started that nightmare, I didn't want any more of it. But I still heard children's voices. Surely I wasn't hallucinating audially, if my visual input was tracking, was I? "Children?" I asked.

"The damaged crate," Bopp said shortly. He wasn't keen on our little visitors, either. None of us was child-oriented; that was one of the reasons we worked a transit station instead of a Homeworld.

Nadi began a long explanation; I cut my ears out of circuit and figured it out for myself. They'd unpacked her to care for me. She'd found the blasted crate and insisted on opening it, no matter what it did to our food-time ratio, or our sanity.

"Just the one crate?"

Bopp nodded. Nadi was still talking, but Bopp and I understood each other. From the twist of his heavy eyebrows, it was plain she'd wanted to uncrate all of them when she understood they were indefinitely delayed; transit takes a few hours, but we couldn't be rescued for almost twenty years. Deep-frozen for transit, though, the crates would keep.

IT HAD taken us six subjective weeks to reach Ingeborg, but better than twenty years had passed; only planet-based installations could handle the power needed for n-space insertion. So whatever went wrong, wherever it had happened, unless by some odd chance an Installation ship was already in our area, at a base nearly enough complete to receive messages, that was not involved in whatever catastrophe destroyed us, that could be sent to pick us up . . . somewhere in that tangle of reasoning, I'd convinced myself we were stuck here.

Nadi had run down, or perhaps finished.

"Any ideas?" I let my eyebrows wigwag back at Bopp.

"Doc guesses an online sun's gone nova."

"The safeguards?"

"Uh, uh. Those circuits look good on paper, but they've never been really tested. Anyhow, we got a critical overload, the receptor blew, the power's gone. That's it, Sue."

Nadi was chattering again.

"Mari and Carol are just sweet with the tots, but I've had to speak quite harshly to Stewart and Herman about the serious effects of childhood trauma," she chirped. She was a small, brownhaired, plump, smiling person, with a wrenlike way of tilting her head, and a sweet, high trill to her voice. "I suppose it must be hard for you

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to remember, all alone like this, how very sensitive small children are to emotional upset."

I grunted. My arms and legs were numb, but my butt ached like fury where it pressed the ground, and I needed a bedpan, badly. I said as much.

"Oh, my dear, I don't dare lift you; just let it go. I'll clean you up."

"Noplas sheet," I snapped at Bopp, and he trotted off.

"It's a good thing you had scanpanels and airsplints in your medikit," Nadi chattered. She seemed uneasy if she wasn't talking, a trait I had often noticed among guardians.

"We have what we need for emergencies, until we can crate the victim for shipment," I replied. That was why we didn't have a respirator; anyone who needed it probably couldn't survive shipment. But scanpanels, sheets about six millimeters thick that illuminated bony tissue to the naked eye, and airsplints to immobilize fractures, these were simple necessities on any world. She'd used her brain and our equipment, and hopefully done a workmanlike job on me; but my spine was definitely damaged. Well, now I knew where I stood. Or lay.

The sun of Ingeborg blanketed me, and Nadi kept stroking my hair off my forehead; I suppose she thought it was soothing. Bopp galumphed up with a huge roll of noplas, and Nadi helped him fit a catchpan under me.

Relieved, I remembered something Nadi had said.

"'Herman?'" I asked Bopp.

"Doc," he grunted.

Oh, oh. Then he'd be, omigod, Francis; I'd at least be Suzanne, not Sissy, that sillyass diminutive that was supposed to make tots like me. I preferred "Bud," though I'd been tagged that for continually using it instead of names; now it was familiar, friendly. And she'd had to speak firmly to Doc and Stew about traumatizing the brats. A warning bell went off in my head.

"Kids sampling local flora?" I snapped.

"You guessed it."

"You explain?" My eyes slapped Nadi-ways and back.

"Tried to."

Hoo, boy. We had a progressive nurse-attendant on our hands, a dozen unsocialized tots, and a hostile planet.

"Look, Belayen," I began.

"Oh, Sue, please call me Nadi." So she could be informal with another woman.

"Whatever. Do you realize that anything those tots ingest is dangerous? Reactions range from acute allergy to actual death-by-poisoning. And we tested healthy adults, with carefully measured minidoses. Take the pseudopears, they look and taste delicious, but are deadly; fruit sugars are rapidly absorbed and rejected. Are you

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sure you've warned the children?"

"They're much too young to heed warnings, Suzanne. Mari and the others are guarding them."

"How old are they?"

"The youngest is eight," Bopp growled. "In my opinion, that's a fair age to learn, madam. Any kid of eight who can't understand a simple rule in Basic Standard, is too defective to survive on the rim."

"Oh, they'll learn, Francis, they'll learn; but gradually, through experience and reasonable explanation, not by frightening lectures, and certainly not through punishment. It will take time, of course, and they must be carefully watched, but they will learn, and without damage to their personal integration. It would have been a good thing if you and your friends had had the benefit of a modern upbringing."

That was a low blow; all of us were twenty years outdated just by being here, but we'd all grown up in the usual Environment; none of us had experienced family-group trauma. Bopp reacted with characteristic tact.

"Madam, if those children eat anything here, the result will be far more traumatic than any lecture I can imagine. More traumatic even than corporal punishment. More . . ."

"Don't be silly, Francis," she cut him off in midflight. "They're carefully watched. What can possibly happen?"

"It's been my experience," I began, but she cut me off, too.

"I'll just go and check up on them, since you two are so anxious about them. I'm getting a new outlook on you primitive types—a very favorable one. I thought you took this sort of job because you were unable to adapt to a child-oriented environment." She trotted off, still flinging compliments over her shoulder.

"I wonder what the survival factor really is on newsettled worlds?" I muttered.

"Very, very low," Doc replied, coming up behind us. "Damn shame, really. They're bright little bastards, every one of them. We'll have some bad cases of poisoning soon; the others'll have to learn from that." He dropped beside me, wagging his bald head sadly.

"I doubt if they'll be allowed to," I said, thinking back over my training. "I bet if one of them gets sick it will be hustled into isolation, and the others won't be told why. Hard truth is too raw for tender minds."

"Tell me you're kidding," Bopp pleaded.

"Unless things have changed radically, I'm not."

"Where could they find an isolation unit here?" Doc asked practically.

"But those kids are bred for transit," Bopp exclaimed at the same time.

"Sure they are," I answered Bopp. "But they're born on Home-

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worlds, raised in Environments, cared for by psychologically oriented Guardians, none of whom have ever been out. What they see doesn't impress them, they're raised on holovee. They *know* about animals, but nothing with teeth has ever *chased* them. I mean the adults, Bopp, the ones who raise these children. They baby them to shipping age, pack them off—and never really connect their training with the horrifying mortality-rate; it isn't real to them.

"If Nadi had completed transit, she'd find herself with a couple of hundred children, on a raw world with very little help and a few basic supplies, on the far end of a pipeline that is stingy at the best of times, except with more warm bodies. *That* is the only thing Homeworlds has a surplus of, the only thing they'll ship out in quantity. The ones that lived would be the ones fit to manage the colony . . . I suppose . . ." I was getting tired.

"They must lose all their socialization under those circumstances," Doc mused, chewing thoughtfully on a fingernail.

"Seems pretty damn cruel to me, and wasteful, too," Bopp answered. "Better teach them something first, and give them a fighting chance."

"They'd get a better return on their investment, too."

"Not all tots ship out," I muttered. "They'd be teaching their own people survival tactics, too."

I'd never thought of that before; I'd simply had a gut reaction to the amorphous atmosphere of the Environment, created a trauma or two, and been rejected from Guardianship as incorrigible. I'd been upset at the time, of course, but no, I had to admit that working for Interworld, up to now, had been a hellovalot better. Trying to prevent infant trauma had traumatized me pretty thoroughly; working with a bunch of perfectly egocentered adults had salvaged me. And now we were playing guardian again, dancing to Nadi's tune like a bunch of blobheaded jellybags.

NADI was a Guardian, but Ingeborg was our planet. We knew our way around, and she didn't. We could put those kids on the right track ourselves; hopefully before any of them died from her pussyfooting. Ingeborg was a paradise—aside from the fact that nothing on it was edible; if we could just hammer home that simple lesson, and keep the kids from falling out of trees, or drowning, we had a good chance of raising them.

Oh, no, we don't, said I to myself. Better let them die now; we won't have enough food.

Twenty years' rations for eight wouldn't begin to feed us, Nadi, and twelve growing children. But I couldn't simply accept letting them die . . .

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I must have slept the clock around; the morning sun was full in my face, and I squinted, trying to see who sat beside me. I risked turning my head, just a fraction, before pain warned me that was plenty, thank you! But my back ached even more than it had yesterday, and my legs tingled. I was delighted. Nothing could be as terrifying as that first dead numbness.

"Carol?"

She bent over me, straight brown hair curtaining her cheeks.

"Hi, Bud. Hungry?" Oh, that beautiful, practical gal!

Then she fetched Doc, and we worked out a system for outmaneuvering Nadi long enough to indoctrinate the children. I dredged theory out of my aborted training; Garth, Mari, Carol, Stew, and Doc did all the work. Bopp ran herd on Nadi, and Nadi labored grimly to get me on my feet, possibly thinking that once that was accomplished, she could regain full control of the tots.

We lost two of them, before they settled down and took us seriously. The rest of them saw exactly what happened, the retching, the convulsions, the delirium . . . it was a hundred times more effective than any lecture.

Stew caught another little whatnot and, playing with it, the kids got their minds off the recent horror. They named their new pet Puddles, and pretty soon two of the older boys came home with another one. Doc suggested they call that one Piddle, but was fortunately outvoted. The girls tagged it Cocoa, because it was almost black, with a white tuft on the tail which, they explained, was the marshmallow in the cup . . . by then, I was walking. Very short distances, with lots of help, but walking.

And we were already into our second years' rations.

RAISING kids on Ingeborg was almost fun, once we understood what we were doing. Even Nadi had to admit, after a few furious months, that we hadn't caused any paralyzing traumas. Kids went everywhere and did everything with adults; soon each adult found a favorite among the kids, and some were naturally left out. So we had to agree among ourselves that we'd share out as evenly as possible, and the one thing we'd never do was pit "my" kid against "your" kid . . . tricky, in practice, no matter how easy it is to say. Before long we found we needed very little discipline. The kids were busy and respected, with jobs to do and enough people to turn to that no one was neglected, and we didn't overpraise anyone, either. Doc said our community was modeled after certain ancient Terran Amerindian societies, but none of us had even heard of a Terran Amerind. We just did what seemed right at the time.

We learned a good deal about

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Ingeborg; for one thing, we found that the whatnots were bisexual, reproduced marsupially, and that Cocoa was of one sex, the one with the pouch, and Puddles was of the other, and laid the babies Cocoa carried and fed. Pretty soon we had a herd of whatnots, following the kids around, lumberingly friendly.

It was four years before deterioration began in the two tot-crates stored in the deepcache with our rations. By then *our* tots ranged from twelve to fourteen, and we were faced with another worry. We adults had been made sterile before being shipped here *in corpora*, but Nadi and the kids had been crated for a rimworld that needed warm bodies; they'd been sent out to breed like rabbits.

We had a choice: stretch a few lives for rescue (and to do that, the kids practically had to stop eating, forget about having babies) or uncrate the rest of the tots, and live a short life but a moral one. Delaying making that choice seemed immoral to me, but being human, that was what we did.

We'd rationed ourselves, and as soon as the kids matured physically, we expected the same of them; not starvation, but real austerity. And I guess we'd taken it for granted that more of us would die, in the course of things, and the food would stretch.

I'm not sure how the others felt, but Doc and I watched those kids adolesce with quiet terror. We'd go off to the lake, and watch lungfish lurch out of the water after lowflying insects, and swear bitterly at the fate that gave us such beauty and not a bite to eat.

Doc let me know he felt anything we did about the kids was pretty much up to me. I felt I needed Nadi's cooperation; after all, she was the nurse.

I put it off as long as I could. Finally, the matter was taken out of my hands. I was supervising clean-up; the men were off somewhere with the FEL's; the other girls were elsewhere. Nadi was sitting watching me get the kids to help. We didn't have much to litter with, but you know kids—if there's anything at all, they'll drop it and walk over it as if it wasn't there. Rose and Pete, who were supposed to be helping, were talking with Nadi; I resented their laziness, but was too occupied to speak of it. My kids were working half-heartedly, and watching Nadi and her two covertly. Jody, the youngest boy, had pretty well attached himself to me, because I used an FEL whenever I went very far, and he was crazy about machinery. We'd stripped down and rebuilt the engine together, when it began to vibrate; he was clever, and a quick learner, and I was glad to have him drive me.

I could tell Jody resented Rose and Pete as much as I did, but I didn't expect him to try to shame them into working.

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"Rose loves Petey," he sing-songed, pointing derisively. "Rose and Petey go off together, into the grass." He jerked obscenely. Then he howled, as Jim backhanded him savagely on the mouth, and bored in, head down and fists swinging; Jody wasn't one to take punishment lying down.

"Shut up, you little freak," Jim shouted, fending off Jody's fists. "Just shut your freaking mouth!"

"They do, they do, they do! You're mad, cause you want Tami to go with you! I seen you, I did!"

I was moving as quickly as I could, but Nadi got there first, trying psychology (now, then, dears, what's this all about?) and then physically restraining Jody. I broke the group up with some hastily invented busywork, and they went; they knew I was mad.

"All right, Nadi," I said when the kids were gone, "what can we do about this?"

"About what?" Oh, innocence!

"You know we haven't enough food even for ourselves. We simply can't let the kids breed."

"You talk as if they were animals!"

"In this sense, they are."

"You're jealous."

"Because I'm sterile?" The absurdity of it angered me even more. "At least I'm not hogging rations! You don't know the meaning of austerity!"

"That isn't fair!"

"I've seen you "tasting" the food you're cooking. It makes a meal in itself, your samples!"

"Don't talk to me like that!"

"You don't deny it, do you?" I was screaming.

"Why should I? I never take more than my fair share, what I'd have on any other world!"

"You dumb broad, don't you understand you're making the rest of us starve?"

"I knew you were jealous! Just because I'm fertile, and you're not! You're afraid the men will ignore you!"

"They're sterile, too, and I haven't been ignored, not so's you'd notice! But that isn't the point, Nadi." I strove to speak more calmly. "Really and truly, we can't spare the food. When the deepcache is empty, we'll starve."

"It's still almost full."

"It's built to hold twenty years' rations; we've used six, we've been pretty careful, and it still looks pretty full. But there's no way we can possibly be rescued in less than eighteen years. Figure it out, Nadi; in four years, we've used six years' rations. Even if we're very, very careful, we'll have trouble stretching the food for eighteen years, and there's no guarantee we'll be picked up then, either. Even if we're still alive."

"You're trying to scare me. You just don't like me." She didn't even sound excited any more. I hadn't realized how impervious she was.

"Nadi, we've got to keep the kids

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from breeding. They know about the food, but unless we help them, they won't be able to help themselves. We don't have any birth-control drugs, but you're a nurse. You must have some ideas."

"They're still children, Sue. It can't be all that urgent."

"Have you looked? Those two you were talking to just now are big, strong, fully matured breeders."

"I told you that you were jealous."

What could you do with a woman like that? I swung around, and suddenly realized that Jody was standing beside me, silent, mouth open, face deadly pale. He'd never seen two women screaming at each other before; I suppose we'd managed to do what Nadi had always feared, and traumatized him, but I was too upset to care.

"Are we really going to starve?" he whispered anxiously.

"Not today, love," I replied briskly, trying to get a smile.

Nadi was still standing there, staring triumphantly at me.

"Aren't you supposed to be starting dinner?" I snapped.

"Oh, of course. I wouldn't interfere for the world."

"What?" I yelled. Jody was twelve, not yet pubescent; she could actually sneer at me when she fawned over hulking fourteen-year-olds, and flirted with them, too. Nadi was just as likely to get pregnant as any of them.

I told Jody to go off and play; the men were back, I could hear the FEL's. I knew he'd tell Doc what he'd heard, but I was too angry to think to caution him. I had to think of some way to convince Nadi to teach contraception to the fertile girls, but I couldn't. The more I thought, the madder I got, and the madder I got—the nerve of that woman!—the less able I was to think.

I DON'T know how much later it was when I heard a terrible screech from the cookshack, and saw Jody tearing toward me. I can't stand quite straight, but I can still hurry when I have to.

It was Nadi, of course, vomiting, convulsing; she'd spilled the stew pot and the stove was in real danger of being upset. Rose was holding her head, or trying to; it was more than one girl could handle. Doc and Bopp carried her out where she couldn't hurt herself, and I dug into the drugbox for the small vial of antiallergen that was all we had left.

It had to be deliberate. No one asked about it, not even Doc; no one wanted to know.

By the time Nadi was up and around again, it was obvious that Rose and Tami were already pregnant. Nothing in the medikit would act as a chemical abortifacient, and Nadi swore she hadn't the training to interfere surgically. I'd thought it was fairly simple, but Nadi gave a

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lecture on the subject, and Doc backed her up. She did teach the other kids basic contraception. We watched the blossoming stomachs of the two gravid girls, and I got so I was counting rations in my sleep.

It was hard to realize how desperate our straits were. Ingeborg is so beautiful that Paradise suffers by comparison: warm sun, gentle rain, even climate, sweet water. But Paradise had only one tree forbidden its residents.

The heavier Rose and Tami grew, the more I felt I had to get away. The only way I could see for any of us to live was for some of us to die voluntarily, and I was a logical candidate. But someone would have to see that the kids didn't get out of line, and someone would have to pull those crates out of the deepcache and dump them before Nadi noticed how they were discharging, and someone would have to prod the kids into keeping up their studies and their records—we insisted that each of them write a daily log—and the someone usually seemed to be me; but I was the one who should die, soon, before I used up more rations. So Jody spent quite a lot of time driving me around and generally trying to cheer me up, with Hey You, his darkgold whatnot calf, flatfooting behind—us. When the sun got high, Jody would park the FEL under a clump of pseudopears and help me down, and we'd sit and talk, or I'd sleep while Jody climbed for fruit to toss to Hey You. The whatnots were wild about those pears, which normally didn't drop until they'd dried into a sort of inedible parachute that the wind carried several hundred meters, and where they landed, there'd soon be the beginnings of another clump of trees. They only produced fruit for a few years, though, so they had to seed liberally.

I had the kids keeping notes on everything we found on Ingeborg, anything we thought of, or guessed at; partly for practice, and partly in the desperate hope we'd think of something miraculously lifesaving.

Anyway, this day we went a lot further than usual, over the crest of hills beyond the station and across the broad valley beyond. Then Hey You started to tire, and Jody steered for a clump of trees about halfway up the slope. Before we got there, though, Hey You started to act oddly, sniffing the ground, and shying away, and hopping up and down, and generally acting the fool. So Jody naturally stopped the FEL and we got down to see what her problem was.

There on the ground was a clump of small, deep blue ovoids. I picked one up; it was cool, jellied, but firmly shaped. They lay there like a nest of shell-less eggs without the nest. Hey You pranced about nearby; idly I tossed one to her. She was used to catching pears, and fielded it neatly. Jelly globs dripped off her flews. Then she went absolutely

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wild, spitting, shaking her head, thrusting her paws into her mouth . . . Jody grabbed her and dragged her down to a stream at the foot of the slope, and she thrust her head into the water and shook it, and blew, and choked, and finally drank and drank and drank.

In the meantime, I was thinking. What Hey You could eat, we couldn't. This she instinctively knew she shouldn't eat; maybe we could. It was a wild chance, but hadn't I already figured I'd be the one to die?

I nibbled an egg, nervously, half expecting it to burn my tongue, so I'd spit and paw my mouth like the poor whatnot. But it was bland, slightly salty, sort of a cross between raw egg and lightly flavored gelatin. I licked my fingers, packed the rest into the carryall of the FEL, and drove down the hill to where Jody knelt beside Hey You. The calf was down, breathing harshly and trembling. I helped Jody tie it to the loader.

All the way back, I kept watching myself for some reaction, shuddering sympathetically with the suffering whatnot, but it was all sympathy. I felt fine.

Nadi eagerly helped with the nearly comatose calf. I took Doc aside and showed him the eggs.

"How long ago did you eat it?" he asked, turning up my eyelids and taking my pulse.

"Must have been two hours," I said around the thermometer. "The whatnot reacted instantly, though."

"Any more of them out there?"

I shrugged; where there were eggs there were egg-layers—and thus more eggs. Obviously. He removed the thermometer.

"Temperature's normal. No cramps, no vomiting, no hives or asthma . . . so far."

"I didn't look for any more. I went to help Jody with the calf."

Doc glanced at the sky. "Too late to go back today, I'm afraid. Let's hope you tolerate this, and there's lots more, and they don't spoil . . ." he breathed the list like a prayer.

We boiled the eggs and I ate them. Doc wanted to share them with me, but I told him that was stupid and he admitted as much. I slept badly, still expecting symptoms; Doc sat quietly beside me. Either he was a lot more confident in my fate than I, or he was a better actor.

Hey You died in the night. We carried her back to the valley of the blue eggs and buried her there, which seemed to comfort Jody somewhat. Then we hunted the whole hillside for more eggs, and found nothing. Hot and tired, we gathered by the pseudopear tree beside Hey You's grave.

"We'll have to search with whatnots," I said. "It was Hey You that found those others."

Naturally the kids raised a storm of protest; they were as attached to

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their pets as Jody. We held an impromptu town meeting on the sunny hillside, shouting at each other and generally growing incoherent and red in the face.

"We won't make that mistake again," I yelled, silencing them by sheer volume. "It was my fault that Hey You ate that egg. We spotted them by her avoidance reaction; she knew better than to eat them. If I hadn't tossed it like a pear, she'd be fine now—but we might not know we could eat those things."

Doc took a turn emphasizing the importance of a new food supply to help us hold till rescue; they knew it, but they needed reminding.

"So what's the maximum time to rescue, Herman?" Nadi asked innocently.

"Forever, Madam." Doc's voice was frosty.

She thought he was kidding.

WE WERE too excited to wait for the girls to deliver before mounting a full scale expedition. Carol and Mari packed food, Stew rounded up the whatnots with the kids, I revved up an FEL while Garth, Doc, and Bopp consulted on a course from the old aerial maps. Nadi and Mari would stay with Rose and Tami. Everyone else would spread the whatnots into a loose sweeping crescent, while I rode drag on the FEL to watch for strays, and run errands. Like, hopefully, carrying back clutches of eggs.

This was new territory for us; there'd never seemed much point in exploration, knowing that there was nothing out there to eat. Surveys showed that the miles and miles of lake-dotted prairie simply went on for miles and miles. We planned to sweep out straight past the valley as far as we felt safe supply-wise, then return on a passing sweep. If necessary.

It wasn't. Large clumps of the clear, shell-less eggs showed up just over the hill from Hey You's valley; we ate them for the evening meal. The next morning we found enough "nests" to make it worthwhile for me to run them back to base for processing. The whatnots were perfect pointers; they bucked and whined and carried on to our complete satisfaction. They also misbehaved around various bare patches of earth, where the prairie grass had rotted to the ground; Doc guessed that decaying egg-masses had poisoned the soil.

However, we never saw anything that could have laid the eggs, not one sign of any strange animal. And it had to be strange, whatever dropped anything we could eat. Naturally we wanted to identify it. If it was alien to the planet, it had to have a food supply somewhere that we could eat. If it/they could eat the rotated proteins and somehow untwisted them in their bodies, we might be able to eat *them.*

I had nearly twenty kilos of eggs to take back to camp. And I met

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Mari, hiking out to meet me, following the flattened grass.

I didn't need to ask.

"Nadi decrated the rest of the kids. Right?"

Mari nodded, breathlessly, then burst into tears.

I got her calmed down, and she explained.

"She must have seen the crates when she went to the cache right after you left. I didn't even know she was going, we didn't *need* any more food out, we had *plenty,* but you know what a glutton she is.

"At least that's what I think she did. Because she must have drugged us. She doesn't trust us, especially since that stew . . . anyhow, we all woke with a sick headache about noon—with tots popping all over the place."

"Damn," I groaned. "If she'd just waited til we were sure of those eggs, we'd have uncrated the children properly! Any adults in those crates?"

"No. Oh, Bud, I'd forgotten what hellions our kids were! We tried to round them up and lecture them, but Nadi interfered. She's going to raise this group her way. You wouldn't believe the time we had! And now four or five of the kids are poisoned, and Nadi was trying to get the rest away instead of nursing the sick ones, but anyhow we haven't any more antiallergen, and Tami went into labor, and I tried to get Nadi to help her, but Nadi was hysterical, she wasn't even making sense. So Rose and I hammered some rules into the kids; they were pretty scared by that time, and I came to get help."

"Out to fetch the cavalry?" I tried to keep my voice light. The one time Mari should have stuck it out . . . but I should talk; I'd left Nadi where she could get at those crates.

"I had to! Nadi's gone sort of catatonic, the kids are scared out of their minds, the sick ones must be dying, Tami's in labor, and poor Rose can't cope." She wrapped herself around me and sobbed miserably. I disentangled myself, cursing our stupidity in not providing radio-transmitters for our expedition. We hadn't built any before; we rarely were out of earshot. But we should have planned better, not rushed off in all directions at the first hope of survival.

We could cobble up transceivers from transmitter parts easily enough; we'd left the remaining station alone, as if it could magically link us to the universe. Now was the time to rip into it for every bit of technology we could salvage.

We were going to survive! Our lives had meaning again! Before anyone could rescue us, there'd be a third generation on Ingeborg; we'd make sure our rescuers found people, not savages. We'd find metal ore, we'd reinvent tools that didn't require intricate fabrication. Our little colony had a real chance for life.

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I raced the FEL back, in time to see Tami's baby boy born.

WELL, now we know that whatever disrupted our station was probably more than an online nova; it's more than ten years past the date we figured for rescue. We don't talk about that any more.

Bopp's dead, and Garth, and Stew; I'm pretty crippled, but I get a lot of help. Statistically, women live longer than men. Statistics *hurt* in a small group like ours.

We've done a lot, though. We had a small sack of seeds in store, from the colonization check; prayerfully we "killed" a patch of ground with rotted eggs, and sowed that withered seed. Some of it grew, and we hoarded its seed, and the next harvest was better; the growing season is pretty much continuous, though we have to reconstitute the soil almost constantly. With the grain and vegetables we can grow, the eggs provide us with a pretty balanced diet.

While we're picking up all the blue eggs we can find, we find more and more of them. Apparently we're encouraging production.

We work; oh, my god, how we work! There's so little time left for us. We should have realized much sooner that we were on our own, and faced our real problem: creating a viable society for our successors. (Not *our children*. How I regret my casual accession to permanent sterilization. Sometimes I'd almost rather leave damaged descendents than none at all . . . but our kids understand, and try to help; we're all multiple godparents.)

Pseudopearleaves soaked in mild caustic, beaten, pressed, and rolled dry make fair paper; we don't encourage authorship, we require it. This is one society that will have complete historical records, and plenty of them. Everyone contributes to the evening thinktalks, and even the wildest suggestions are considered. Something one of the youngsters said gave Doc and Jody the idea for our improved gangplow; the permanent ink Pete makes came from a chance remark of mine about using fish secretions as fixative. Ingeborgian fish don't cooperate, but there's a kind of large beetle that does.

The kids are fantastic, but we're the ones who *remember*. They *understand* about *in corpora* ships and n-space transmitters, but we're the only ones who really *believe* in them. Their memories of glowlux and holovee are fading; they never had a chance to explore their "civilized world." But they won't be savages. They have their records, and their gumption, and everything we can fabricate before we've all left them. We even teach them n-space maths, impractical as they seem to kids who will spend their lives herding whatnots, farming, and collecting blue eggs; Doc

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claims they're a religion, now. I say they're *true*, and someday they'll be useful to them.

Nadi has authored an Epic: drama, dance, music, and history all stylized and interwoven. She takes each group of adolescents into her exclusive care for a year, and they learn to perform it for the anniversary of the Blast; it's sort of a "coming of age" rite for them. I suppose it's her substitute for the Environment she'd like to isolate every tot in. It keeps a sense of history alive, and it's not bad ritual, though the language is elaborate, and everyone is shown as tremendously wise and capable. She's left out all of our shocked scrambling and frantic making-do. In the Epic, when we find the eggs, we've almost starved to death, though it's quite soon after the Blast, and everyone gathers to sing formal praise to the Power that spread manna in the desert, with phrases copped whole from her Bible. She's put in a lot about me, making my recovery sound practically miraculous; this boosts her part, of course, and also lends authority to my finding the blue eggs. I get very embarrassed, listening to an awestruck child pretending to be me; I feel as if I were being deified.

Nadi's moved herself and her school out to the remains of the transmitter. We were glad enough to see her go; she's gone rather dramatic and strange, but it doesn't seem to hurt the kids to let her teach them for just one year. She guards the cache, and what's left of the equipment fanatically, though no one would think of touching them. There's just a few rations left, which we save for the annual Blastday Feast, and of course we've used everything we could from the transmitter, but Nadi's laid out everything that's left in solemn rows, carefully labeled; their arrangement bears no relation to their function, but she takes the kids on tour, and they recite the names Garth and Doc wrote on her labels like a hive of reverent bees. Even Becky's tooled leather belt with the gold buckle is there; she should have been buried in it, but we didn't find it until later, and no one wanted to wear it. Sometimes I wonder if the kids think it was part of the works? Nothing on the label says it wasn't, and it must make as much sense to them as the crysta-circuits and transplates.

Nadi sought me out recently, and breathlessly whispered that she'd heard a space ship land, way back before we found the first blue eggs. Naturally, I asked her why she waited so long to tell us, and I guess I hurt her feelings, being so skeptical; she plans to write it into the Epic. Doc says it's to compensate for not being rescued. We can't believe her; none of us heard anything, but if it helps her to think that way, there doesn't seem to be much harm in it.

Anyway, she attributes the egg-

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layers to divine providence, so an actual spaceboat is supererogatory. The fact that we've never been able to catch one of them, or even get a decent picture before we ran out of landfilm, has reinforced her certainty in their supernatural origin. And it is true that the nights we watched from concealed blinds, they went elsewhere; we even had to search out their eggs again with whatnots. After that we put out a tripwired camera; it caught a blur, and they got scary again, and it took weeks before things settled down. I think they're psi-sensitive, or empathic, or both. They aren't big, that much we know, and they move *very* fast.

And it's plain they never evolved on Ingeborg. Somewhere there may be worlds with evenly mixed rotations; as Doc says, just because we haven't found one doesn't mean they don't exist. The point is, the egglayers shouldn't exist *here.*

I tend to believe they're escapees from some alien expedition, maybe strayed pets, and they couldn't multiply until we came along to clean up after them, so they didn't poison their pasture. Before, they'd have to keep on the move, and that couldn't be a good way to raise their young. On the other hand, if they're intelligent, I suppose they could eventually try to control us. Keep *us* as *their* useful pets.

So I'm just as glad we can't see them. We imagine them as fantastic, benevolent, beautiful creatures, aware of our omnivorous appetites. Nadi's working on that, though; she has a couple of her little granddaughters in training now, learning to think loving thoughts at the creatures. Some day they'll go out, pure dedicated virgins, to entice our shy egglaying unicorns. (Nadi's education didn't include the classical myths, but I wonder: what happened to captured unicorns?)

Maybe Nadi *is* creating a religion, as Doc says, while the rest of us build a society to fit. That's scary; religions don't deal with the world as it is, they always set out to change it. While Nadi worships whatever provided the egglayers, and the Hand of God is as good a name as any, I guess it's safe; if she ever centers her devotion on the egglayers themselves . . . that really bothers me. That's when I wish I'd gone ahead and finished the job the poisoned stew began, so long ago.

But the rest of us have our illusions, too; we still call them egglayers. We've always *known* those blue spheres weren't eggs; even extraterrestrial eggs would have internal coherence, and no creature as biologically advanced as these would leave its next generation to rot.

Ever hear of Coprid beetles? We *know* what we're eating, but it doesn't sicken us, as long as we think of it as eggs.

We've built a life here, collecting eggs in Eden. ★

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GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Theodore Sturgeon

An Ellison bonanza for those addicted to him and for those who want more material to go on hating him a lot. One is a reissue (*Ellison Wonderland.* Signet, $1.25) of his first, 1962 collection. In a way it has always been my favorite Ellison book, one against which one may measure the astonishing distance he has traveled since he wrote stories like *The Silver Corridor* and *Do-it-Yourself.* Intrinsically a good entertaining book, it is, especially with the new 1974 introduction, an important strophe in the Ellison saga. The other book is *Approaching Oblivion* (Walker, $7.95), which the author certainly is not. The man could die dead and not do that. The book contains all recent stories and one new one, and is as angry and as abrasive as anything he has done to date. A certain degree of disillusion has come to Ellison in recent years, and small wonder. Now he is angry because no one (he thinks) has been listening, no one (he thinks) has been moved by his energy, his passion, his compassion and his fury. Now he's mad at *you.* I think more people have listened, have been moved by him than he realizes. I have become aware recently that among the great numbers of ex-flower-children from the late 'sixties who have cut their hair and reverted to tobacco have not, after all, changed anything but their exteriors. So it is with the ones who marched, the ones who protested, the ones who hoped and acted, dreamed and acted. They're under cover rather than underground now, but the change in them in basic no matter what appearances tell the pundits. Trivial and deep, certain changes take place within and around us, and *Vogue* and *Women's Wear*

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Daily cannot eliminate the bikini and the miniskirt, President Ford cannot disappear Watergate, Rome cannot cancel contraception. Ellison is supremely right in crying out in outrage against what he calls in his introduction students' sinking "back into a charming Fifties apathy (with a simultaneous totemization of the banalities and mannerisms of those McCarthy Witch-Hunt Fifties) . . ." but he seems not to be aware of the true meaning, for example of the explosion of fury against Nixon when he fired Archibald Cox and instigated the "Saturday Night Massacre." I beg Harlan Ellison in this open forum not to despair, not to abandon either his passion nor the compassion which is his true wellspring, a deeper one than that puddle of anger and retribution in which he still insists on splashing and stomping. People have listened and will listen; people can change and will.

The book carries a gracious Foreword by Michael Chricton, and the stories are a maelstrom and a chiaroscuro. Get it.

Dig this:

Now we can predict this apocalyptic date to within a couple of years. A remarkable chain of evidence, much of it known for decades but never before linked together, points to 1982 as the year in which the Los Angeles region of the San Andreas fault will be subjected to the most massive earthquake known in the populated regions of the Earth in this century. At the endpoint of the chain, directly causing this disaster, is a rare alignment of the planets in the Solar System. By disturbing the equilibrium of the Sun, which in turn disturbs the whole Earth, the planets can trigger earthquakes. The trail links astrology—for that is really what the study of planetary alignments is, even though we can explain their effects in sound scientific terms—astronomy, meteorology, geology, geophysics and other sciences. Small wonder that pieces of this chain have lain about unrecognized for so long. But now they have been put together there is no question about the implication: in 1982, when the Moon is in the Seventh House, and Jupiter aligns with Mars and with the other seven planets of the Solar System, Los Angeles will be destroyed. The astrological link with the dawning of the age of Aquarius may or may not be coincidence; that is outside the scope of this book, which contains only solid scientific evidence and reasoning.

Never in my book-reviewing life before have I given away the punchline, exposed the plot, until I wrote the above, which is p. 116 of *The Jupiter Effect* (Walker, introduc-

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tion by Isaac Asimov, with two appendices and an index, $7.95.) Startling as it is, this conclusion is not the most interesting aspect of the book. Its authors, John Gribbin, an editor of the international science magazine *Nature*, and Stephen Plagemann, a meteorologist (among other things) with NASA, are not by any means kooks with a nutty theory. As Asimov points out in his introduction, they have gathered widely disparate clues and pieced them together with a meticulousness which rivals the performance of the greatest fictional detectives. And like detectives who know that a trial must follow their revelation, they lay out every scrap of evidence and every link of their chain of reasoning for examination and test. A more exciting, a more pertinent narrative would be hard to find. One thing particularly appealed to me: so many science and popular-science articles and books pursue a notion isolated, insulated from human affairs and human nature. What this book points out, explicitly and implicitly, about the bull-headedness and greed, the purposeful marriage to ignorance, of growth-oriented politicians and developers in earthquake-prone California, is almost as devastating as the quake itself. As in all good literature, the message, the moral, is larger than the narrative. This is going to be a most prestigious and effective book, especially out here in Never-never Land. Not effective enough, of course, but then . . . human beings will make their point, even more effectively than Gribbin and Plagemann.

AND speaking of the Good Doctor, he has (of course) another new book, and it was reviewed for us by the printer. As you may know, I get a good many forthcoming books in the form of galleys—long printed sheets, by which the printer sets up his type preparatory to breaking it down into pages. Each galley has the name of the book at the top, together with various codings, and the number of the galley. At the top of Galley 5 in this one, where the title is supposed to go, the printer wrote:

The Best Is Isaac Asimov

The Best of Isaac Asimov (Doubleday, $6.95) really needs no other remarks than that; nevertheless, I shall make some. The book is a collection of a dozen stories, chosen by the author as his own personal favorites. Some, like *Nightfall*, are acknowledged classics; some, like *Marooned Off Vesta*, you may never have heard of, and are here because of Asimov's nostalgia for the peripheral circumstance of their origins. All of this he covers in a typical, charming, highly personal asimovian introduction. It all helps to know the man better and, being what he is (to know him is to love him),

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knowing him better is to love him more.

I DO NOT know when Mr. van Daniken trotted out his first chariot, but it says here that Jacques Bergier wrote his *Les Extra-Terrestres dans L'histoire* for publication in 1970. The Regnery hardcover is dated 1973, and now we have it in paperback, as *Extra-terrestrial Visitations from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Signet, indexed, $1.50). It is so much better written, better reasoned, and generally, well, better than the original chariot and all its cabooses (now, there's an image for you) that one can only be horrified at the popularity of the Swiss sensationalist and his many imitators, just as one can be appalled at the fact that the publisher binds it to look like the others. It's like putting a diamond seventh in line behind zircons. Bergier's premise is that we have been visited by other beings whose function was (is?) to bring us knowledge, and also to create surprises in order to study our reactions and thus gauge our progress. In the course of this endeavor, he gives us some of the most fascinating glimpses not only of a good many of the things van D writes about, but of strange and wonderful men in history, like Lord Cavendish and Benjamin Franklin, to name only a couple, and the vortices of knowledge which spun off from them and into their cultures. The big difference between Bergier and the others—even the others who obsessively debink each other—is that they all insist, while Bergier merely lays it out, lucidly and in an orderly fashion. If you are moved by van Daniken at all, it is likely that it will be in the direction of faith-full acceptance. Bergier gives you solid leads for your own research. If you want your sense of wonder reborn, get this book.

MAD Michael Moorcock is at it again, this time with the further adventures of Jherek Carnelian, a resident of the wild, weird hedonistic culture "at the end of time." *An Alien Heat* was the first volume of a trilogy, and this, *The Hollow Lands,* (Harper & Row, $6.95) is the second. In the first book we met Mrs. Amelia Underwood, snatched mysteriously into the far future from 1896 London, where the incomparable Jherek, the most naive innocent since Billy Budd, yet still to be compared with no one else you have ever encountered, falls wildly and obsessively in love with her, follows her back to her own time, then returns alone to his own by means I shall not tell you. In this book, driven by his passion, he returns to her again, and they have—adventures. So much for the plot skeleton. Only Moorcock can convey the outrageous texture of these narratives, the bored and potent subsidiary

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characters, and the fabulous—that is, the real human truths for which all this madness is metaphor—quality of the tale-telling and the prose. Aside from R. A. Lafferty, I doubt there is a more accomplished prose stylist than Michael Moorcock alive. (Well, maybe Nabakov.) I must say again, as I did in reporting on the first book, that I'd gladly have waited a bit for this one and the next, to get them all in one volume. At these prices, and 180-some pages for each, *The Dancers at the End of Time* trilogy will come high. But then—you'll have a high time with it. Con your library into getting it all, in any case.

I THINK it's time, and just, and kind of nice to salute our friendly rival with a mention of its 25th birthday and *The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction* (Doubleday, $7.95), one hell of a good book, edited by Edward L. Ferman. Now, I feel a little funny about this, because one of my stories is in it and, as I have said before, I tend not to review books with my stories in them. In this case, however, I feel I must. What Mr. Ferman has done is to gather together the lead stories of six of F&SF's special issues, each of which featured an appreciation of the author by someone who knew him when, and a bibliography. The appreciations are by Judith Merrill, (two of them), William F. Nolan, L. Sprague de Camp, Gordon R. Dickson, and Robert A. W. Lowndes. The updated, books-only biblios were compiled by the authors and/or Sam Moskowitz, William F. Nolan, Al Lewis and Mark Owings. The authors are Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Fritz Leiber, Poul Anderson and James Blish. And what's-his-name. Every one of these stories is not only good; it is, in my mind, important.

AND here again comes the bottom of the page, and I have so much more to tell you about. With the wish that I could expand my comments, let me recommend *Sundance* (Nelson, $6.50), a fine new collection by Robert Silverberg; *Andiomeda Gun,* (Berkley/Putnam, $5.95) a swift strong novel by John Boyd; *Continuum 3* (Berkley/Putnam, $5.95) Roger Elwood's brilliant idea of a series; eight discrete but connected novelettes by Farmer, Anderson, Oliver, Scortia, McCaffrey, Wolfe, Pangborn and Sargent/Zebrowski; *The Many Worlds of Andre Norton* (Chilton, ed. Roger Elwood, bibliography, $6.95), a fine sampler of this prodigious writer. Features a Rick Brooks critical appreciation which is most perspicacious; and a most provoking non-fiction book, *Worlds in Creation* (Regnery, $7.95) by Kenneth Gatland, President of the British Interplanetary Society, and scientist-test pilot Derek Dempster. I'll tell you more about this one in my next. ★

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THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

He returned from the fathomless depths of space to reclaim his lost love—and they lived happily ever after . . .

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ROBERT SILVERBERG

NATURALLY, there was a tremendous fuss made over him, since he was the first man actually to buy up his indenture and return from a colony-world. He had been away eighteen years, farming on bleak Novotny IX, and who knew how many of those years he had been slaving and saving to win his passage home?

Besides, rumor had it that a girl was involved. It could be the big romance of the century, maybe. Even before the ship carrying him had docked at Long Island Spaceport, John Burkhardt was a system-famed celebrity. Word of his return had preceded him—word, and all manner of rumor, legend and myth.

The starship *Lincoln*, returning from a colony-seeding trip in the outer reaches of the galaxy, for the first time in its history, was carrying an Earthward-bound passenger. A small army of newsmen impatiently awaited the ship's landing, and the nine worlds waited with them.

When he stepped into the unloading elevator and made his descent, a hum of comment rippled through the gathered crowd. Burkhardt looked his part perfectly. He was a tall man, spare and lean. His face was solemn, his lips thin and pale, his hair going gray though he was only in his forties. And his eyes—deepset, glowering, commanding. Everything fit the myth: the physique, the face, the eyes. They were those of a man who could renounce Earth for unrequited love, then toil eighteen years out of the sheer strength of that love.

Cameras ground. Bulbs flashed. Five hundred reporters felt their tongues going dry with anticipation of the big story.

Burkhardt smiled coldly and waved at the horde of newsmen. He did not blink, shield his eyes, or turn away. He seemed almost unnaturally in control of himself. They had expected him to weep, maybe kneel and kiss the soil of Mother Earth. He did none of those things. He merely smiled and waved.

The Global Wire man stepped forward. He had won the lottery. It was his privilege to conduct the first interview.

"Welcome to Earth, Mr. Burkhardt. How does it feel to be back?"

"I'm glad to be here." Burk-

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hardt's voice was slow, deep, measured, controlled like every other aspect of him.

"This army of pressmen doesn't upset you, does it?"

"I haven't seen this many people all at once in eighteen years. But no—they don't upset me."

"You know, Mr. Burkhardt, you've done something special. You're the only man ever to return to Earth after signing out on an indenture."

"Am I the only one?" Burkhardt responded easily. "I wasn't aware of that."

"You are indeed, sir. And I'd like to know, if I may—for the benefit of billions of viewers—if you care to tell us a little of the story behind your story? Why did you leave Earth in the first place, Mr. Burkhardt? And why did you decide to return?"

Burkhardt smiled gravely. "There was a woman," he said. "A lovely woman, a famous woman now. We loved each other, once, and when she stopped loving me I left Earth. I have reason to believe I can regain her love now, so I have returned. And now, if you'll pardon me—"

"Couldn't you give us any details?"

"I've had a long trip, and I prefer to rest now. I'll be glad to answer your questions at a formal press conference tomorrow afternoon."

And he cut through the crowd toward a waiting cab supplied by the Colonization Bureau.

NEARLY everyone in the system had seen the brief interview or had heard reports of it. It had certainly been a masterly job. If people had been curious about Burkhardt before, they were obsessed with him now. To give up Earth out of unrequited love, to labor eighteen years for a second chance—why, he was like some figure out of Dumas, brought to life in the middle of the 24th Century.

It was no mean feat to buy one's self back out of a colonization indenture, either. The Colonization Bureau of the Solar Federation undertook to transport potential colonists to distant worlds and set them up as homesteaders. In return for one-way transportation, tools and land, the colonists merely had to promise to remain settled, to marry, and to raise the maximum practical number of children. This program, a hundred years old now, had resulted in the seeding of Terran colonies over a galactic radius of better than five hundred light-years.

It was theoretically possible for a colonist to return to Earth, of course. But few of them seemed to want to, and none before Burkhardt ever had. To return, you had first to pay off your debt to the government—figured theoretically at $20,000 for round-trip passage, $5000 for land, $5000 for tools—

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plus 6% interest per year. Since nobody with any assets would ever become a colonist, and since it was next to impossible for a colonist, farming an unworked world, to accumulate any capital, no case of an attempted buy-out had ever arisen.

Until Burkhardt. He had done it, working round the clock, outproducing his neighbors on Novotny IX and selling them his surplus, cabling his extra pennies back to Earth to be invested in blue-chip securities, and finally—after eighteen years—amassing the $30,000-plus-accrued-interest that would spring him from indenture.

Twenty billion people on nine worlds wanted to know why.

The day after his return, he held a press conference in the hotel suite provided for him by the Colonization Bureau. Admission was strictly limited—one man from each of the twenty leading news services, no more.

Wearing a faded purplish tunic and battered sandals, Burkhardt came out to greet the reporters. He looked tremendously dignified—an overbearing figure of a man, thin but solid, with enormous gnarled hands and powerful forearms. The gray in his hair gave him a patriarchical look on a world dedicated to cosmetic rejuvenation. And his eyes, shining like twin beacons, roved around the room, transfixing everyone once, causing discomfort and uneasiness. No one had seen eyes like that on a human being before. But no one had ever seen a returned colonist before, either.

He smiled without warmth. "Very well, gentlemen. I'm at your disposal."

THEY started with the peripheral questions first.

"What sort of planet is Novotny IX, Mr. Burkhardt?"

"Cold. The temperature never gets above sixty. The soil is marginally fertile. A man has to work ceaselessly if he wants to stay alive there."

"Did you know that when you signed up to go there?"

Burkhardt nodded. "I asked fort the least desirable of the available colony worlds."

"Are there many colonists there?"

"About twenty thousand, I think. It isn't a popular planet, you understand."

"Mr. Burkhardt, part of the terms of the colonist's indenture specify that me must marry. Did you fulfill this part of the contract?"

Burkhardt smiled sadly. "I married less than a week after my arrival there in 2319. My wife died the first winter of our marriage. There were no children. I didn't remarry."

"And when did you get the idea of buying up your indenture and returning to Earth?"

"In my third year on Novotny IX."

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"In other words, you devoted fifteen years to getting back to Earth?"

"That's correct."

It was a young reporter from Transuniverse News who took the plunge toward the real meat of the universe. "Could you tell us why you changed your mind about remaining a colonist? At the spaceport you said something about there being a woman—"

"Yes." Burkhardt chuckled mirthlessly. "I was pretty young when I threw myself into the colonization plan—twenty-five, in point of fact. There was a woman; I loved her; she married someone else. I did the romantic thing and signed up for Novotny IX. Three years later, the newstap from Earth told me that she had been divorced. This was in 2322. I resolved to return to Earth and try to persuade her to marry me."

"So for fifteen years you struggled to get back so you could patch up your old romance," another newsman said. "But how did you know she hadn't remarried in all that time?"

"She did remarry," Burkhardt said stunningly.

"But—"

"I received word of her remarriage in 2324, and of her subsequent divorce in 2325. Of her remarriage in 2327, and of her subsequent divorce in 2329. Of her remarriage in the same year, and her subsequent divorce in 2334. Of her remarriage in 2335, and of her divorce four months ago. Unless I have missed the announcement, she has not remarried this last time."

"Did you abandon your project every time you heard of one of these marriages?"

Burkhardt shook his head. "I kept on saving. I was confident that none of her marriages would last. All these years, you see, she's been trying to find a substitute for me. But human beings are unique. There are no substitutes. I weathered five of her marriages. Her sixth husband will be myself."

"Could you tell us—could you tell us the name of this woman, Mr. Burkhardt?"

The returned colonist's smile was frigid. "I'm not ready to reveal her name just yet," he said. "Are there any further questions?"

Along toward mid-afternoon, Burkhardt ended the conference. He had told them in detail of his efforts to pile up the money; he had talked about life as a colonist; he had done everything but tell them the name of the woman for whose sake he had done all this.

Alone in the suite after they had gone, Burkhardt stared out at the other glittering towers of New York. Jet liners droned overhead; a billion lights shattered the darkness. New York, he thought, was as chaotic and as repugnant to him as ever. He missed Novotny IX.

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But he had had to come back. Smiling gently, he opaqued the windows of his suite. It was winter, now, on Novotny IX's colonized continent. A time for burrowing away, for digging in against the mountain-high drifts of blue-white snow. Winter was eight standard months long, on Novotny IX; only four out of the sixteen standard months of the planet's year were really livable. Yet a man could see the results of his own labor, out there. He could use his hands and measure his gains.

And there were friends there. Not the other settlers, though they were good people and hard workers. But the natives, the Euranoi.

The survey charts said nothing about them. There were only about five hundred of them left, anyway, or so Donnoi had claimed. Burkhardt had never seen more than a dozen of the Euranoi at any one time, and he had never been able to tell one from another. They looked like slim elves, half the height of a man, gray-skinned, chinless, sad-eyed. They went naked against their planet's bitter cold. They lived in caves, somewhere below the surface. And Donnoi had become Burkhardt's friend.

Burkhardt smiled, remembering. He had found the little alien in a snowdrift, so close to dead it was hard to be certain one way or the other. Donnoi had lived, and had recovered, and had spent the winter in Burkhardt's cabin, talking a little, but mostly listening.

Burkhardt had done the talking. He had talked it all out, telling the little being of his foolishness, of his delusion that Lily loved him, of his wild maniac desire to get back to Earth.

And Donnoi had said, when he understood the situation, *"You will get back to Earth. And she will be yours."*

That had been between the first divorce and the second marriage. The day the newstapes had brought word of Lily's remarriage had nearly finished Burkhardt, but Donnoi was there, comforting, consoling, and from that day on Burkhardt never worried again. Lily's marriages were made, weakened, broke up, and Burkhardt worked unfalteringly, knowing that when he returned to Earth he could have Lily at last.

Donnoi had told him solemnly, *"It is all a matter of channelling your desires. Look: I lay dying in a snowdrift, and I willed you to find me. You came; I lived."*

"But I'm not Euranoi," Burkhardt had protested. "My will isn't strong enough to influence another person."

"Any creature that thinks can assert its will. Give me your hand, and I will show you."

Burkhardt smiled back across fifteen years, remembering the feel of Donnoi's limp, almost boneless hand in his own, remembering the

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stiff jolt of power that had flowed from the alien. His hand had tingled for days afterward. But he knew, from that moment, that he would succeed.

BURKHARDT had a visitor the next morning. A press conference was scheduled again for the afternoon, and Burkhardt had said he would grant no interviews before then, but the visitor had been insistent. Finally, the desk had phoned up to tell Burkhardt that a Mr. Richardson Elliott was here, and demanded to see him.

The name rang a bell. "Send him up," Burkhardt said.

A few minutes later, the elevator disgorged Mr. Richardson Elliott. He was shorter than Burkhardt, plump, pink-skinned, clean-shaven. A ring glistened on his finger, and there was a gem of some alien origin mounted on a stickpin near his throat.

He extended his hand. Burkhardt took it. The hand was carefully manicured, pudgy, somehow oily.

"You're not at all as I pictured you," Burkhardt said.

"You are. Exactly."

"Why did you come here?"

Elliott tapped the newsfax crumpled under his arm. He unfolded it, showing Burkhardt the front-page spread. "I read the story, Burkhardt. I knew at once who the girl—the woman—was. I came to warn you not to get involved with her."

Burkhardt's eyes twinkled. "And why not?"

"She's a witch," Elliott muttered. "She'll drain a man dry and throw the husk away. Believe me, I know. You only loved her. I married her."

"Yes," Burkhardt said. "You took her away from me eighteen years ago."

"You know that isn't true. She walked out on you because she thought I could further her career, which was so. I didn't even know another man had been in the picture until she got that letter from you, postmarked the day your ship took off. She showed it to me—laughing. I can't repeat the things she said about you, Burkhardt. But I was shocked. My marriage to her started to come apart right then and there, even though it was another three years before we called it quits. She threw herself at me. I didn't steal her from anybody. Believe me, Burkhardt."

"I believe you."

Elliott mopped his pink forehead. "It was the same way with all the other husbands. I've followed her career all along. She exists only for Lily Leigh, and nobody else. When she left me, it was to marry Alderson. Well, she killed him as good as if she'd shot him, when she told him she was pulling out. Man his age had no business marrying her. And then it was Michaels, and after him Dan Cartwright, and

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then Jim Thorne. Right up the ladder to fame and fortune, leaving a trail of used-up husbands behind her."

Burkhardt shrugged. "The past is of no concern to me."

"You actually think Lily will marry you?"

"I do," Burkhardt said. "She'll jump at it. The publicity values will be irresistible. The sollie star with five broken marriages to millionaires now stooping to wed her youthful love, who is now a penniless ex-colonist."

Elliott moistened his lips unhappily. "Perhaps you've got something there," he admitted. "Lily might just do a thing like that. But how long would it last? Six months, a year—until the publicity dies down. And then she'll dump you. She doesn't want a penniless husband."

"She won't dump me."

"You sound pretty confident, Burkhardt."

"I am."

For a moment there was silence. Then Elliott said, "You seem determined to stick your head in the lion's mouth. What is it—an obsession to marry her?"

"Call it that."

"It's crazy. I tell you, she's a witch. You're in love with an imaginary goddess. The real Lily Leigh is the most loathsome female ever spawned. As the first of her five husbands, I can take oath to that."

"Did you come here just to tell me that?"

"Not exactly," Elliott said. "I've got a proposition for you. I want you to come into my firm as a Vice President. You're system-famous, and we can use the publicity. I'll start you at sixty thousand. You'll be the most eligible bachelor in the universe. We'll get you a rejuvenation and you'll look twenty-five again. Only none of this Lily Leigh nonsense. I'll set you up, you'll marry some good-looking kid, and all your years on Whatsis Nine will be just so much nightmare."

"The answer is no."

"I'm not doing this out of charity, you understand. I think you'll be an asset to me. But I also think you ought to be protected against Lily. I feel I owe you something, for what I did to you unknowingly eighteen years ago."

"You don't owe me a thing. Thanks for the warning, Mr. Elliott, but I don't need it. And the answer to the proposition is No. I'm not for sale."

"I beg you—"

"No."

Color flared in Elliott's cheeks for a moment. He rose, started to say something, stopped. "All right," he said heavily. "Go to Lily. Like a moth drawn to a flame. The offer remains, Mr. Burkhardt. And you have my deepest sympathy."

AT HIS press conference that afternoon, Burkhardt revealed her name. The system's interest was at

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peak, now; another day without the revelation and the peak would pass, frustration would cause interest to subside. Burkhardt told them. Within an hour it was all over the system.

Glamorous Lily Leigh, for a decade and a half queen of the solido-films, was named today as the woman for whom John Burkhardt bought himself out of indenture. Burkhardt explained that Miss Leigh, then an unknown starlet, terminated their engagement in 2319 to marry California industrialist Richardson Elliott. The marriage, like Miss Leigh's four later ones, ended in divorce.

"I hope now to make her my wife," the mystery man from Novotny IX declared. "After eighteen years I still love her as strongly as ever."

Miss Leigh, in seclusion at her Scottsdale, Arizona home following her recent divorce from sollie-distributing magnate James Thorne, refused to comment on the statement.

For three days, Lily Leigh remained in seclusion, seeing no one, issuing no statements to the press. Burkhardt was patient. Eighteen years of waiting teaches patience. And Donnoi had told him, as they trudged through the gray slush of rising spring, *"The man who rushes ahead foolishly forfeits all advantages in a contest of wills."*

Donnoi carried the wisdom of a race at the end of its span. Burkhardt remained in his hotel suite, mulling over the advice of the little alien. Donnoi had never passed judgment on the merits and drawbacks of Burkhardt's goal; he had simply advised, and suggested, and taught.

The press had run out of things to say about Burkhardt, and he declined to supply them with anything new to print. So, inevitably, they lost interest in him. By the third day, it was no longer necessary to hold a press conference. He had come back; he had revealed his love for the sollie queen, Lily Leigh; now he was sitting tight. There was nothing to do but wait for further developments, if any. And neither Burkhardt nor Lily Leigh seemed to be creating further developments.

It was hard to remain calm, Burkhardt thought. It was queer to be here on Earth, in the quiet autumn, while winter fury raged on Novotny IX. Fury of a different kind raged here, the fury of a world of five billion eager, active human beings, but Burkhardt kept himself aloof from all that. Eighteen years of near-solitude had left him unfit for that sort of world.

It was hard to sit quietly, though, with Lily just a visicall away. Burkhardt compelled himself to be patient. She would call, sooner or later.

She called on the fourth day. Burkhardt's skin crawled as he heard the hotel operator say—in tones regulated only with enormous

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effort—"Miss Leigh is calling from Arizona, Mr. Burkhardt."

"Put the call on."

She had not used the visi-circuit. Burkhardt kept his screen blank too.

She said, without preliminaries, "Why have you come back after all these years, John?"

"Because I love you."

"Still?"

"Yes."

She laughed—the famous LL laugh, for his benefit alone. "You're a bigger fool now than you were then, John."

"Perhaps," he admitted.

"I suppose I ought to thank you, though. This is the best publicity I've had all year. And at my age I need all the publicity I can get."

"I'm glad for you," he said.

"You aren't serious, though, about wanting to marry me, are you? Not after all these years. Nobody stays in love that long."

"I did."

"Damn you, what do you want from me?" The voice, suddenly shrill, betrayed a whisper of age.

"Yourself," Burkhardt said calmly.

"What makes you think I'll marry you? Sure, you're a hero today, The Man Who Came Back From The Stars. But you're nothing, John. All you have to show for eighteen years is callouses. At least back then you had your youth. You don't even have that any more."

"Let me come to see you, Lily."

"I don't want to see you."

"Please. It's a small thing—let me have half an hour alone with you."

She was silent.

"I've given you half a lifetime of love, Lily. Let me have half an hour."

After a long moment she said, simply, hoarsely, "All right. You can come. But I won't marry you."

HE LEFT New York shortly before midnight. The Colonization Bureau had hired a private plane for him, and he slipped out unnoticed, in the dark. Publicity now would be fatal. The plane was a chemically powered jet, somewhat out of date; they were using photon-rockets for the really fast travel. But, obsolete or no, it crossed the continent in three hours. It was just midnight, local time, when the plane landed in Phoenix. As they had arranged it, Lily had her chauffeur waiting, with a long, sleek limousine. Burkhardt climbed in. Turbines throbbed; the car glided out toward Lily's desert home.

It was a mansion, a sprawled-out villa moated off—a *moat*, in water-hungry Arizona!—and topped with a spiring pink stucco tower. Burkhardt was ushered through open fern-lined courtyards to an inner maze of hallways, and through them into a small room where Lily Leigh sat waiting.

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He repressed a gasp. She wore a gown worth a planet's ransom, but the girl within the gown had not changed in eighteen years. Her face was the same, impish, the eyes dancing and gay. Her hair had lost none of its glossy sheen. Her skin was the skin of a girl of nineteen.

"It's like stepping back in time," he murmured.

"I have good doctors. You wouldn't believe I'm forty, would you? But everyone knows it, of course." She laughed. "You look like an old man, John."

"Forty-three isn't old."

"It is when you let your age show. I'll give you some money, John, and you can get fixed up. Better still, I'll send my doctors to you."

Burkhardt shook his head. "I'm honest about the passing of time. I look this way because of what I've done these past eighteen years. I wouldn't want a doctor's skill to wipe out the traces of those years."

She shrugged lightly. "It was only an offer, not a slur. What do you want with me, John?"

"I want you to marry me."

Her laughter was a silvery tinkle, ultimately striking a false note. "That made sense in 2319. It doesn't now. People would say you married me for my money. I've got lots of money, John, you know."

"I'm not interested in your money. I want *you*."

"You think you love me, but how can you? I'm not the sweet little girl you once loved. I never was that sweet little girl. I was a grasping, greedy little girl—and now I'm a grasping, greedy old woman who still looks like a little girl. Go away, John. I'm not for you."

"Marry me, Lily. We'll be happy. I know we will."

"You're a stupid monomaniac."

Burkhardt only smiled. "It'll be good publicity. After five marriages for profit, you're marrying for love. All the worlds love a lover, Lily. You'll be everyone's sweetheart again. Give me your hand, Lily."

Like a sleepwalker, she extended it. Burkhardt took the hand, frowning at its coldness, its limpness.

"But I don't love you, John."

"Let the world think you do. That's all that matters."

"I don't understand you. You—"

She stopped. Burkhardt's grip tightened on her thin hand. He thought of Donnoi, a gray shadow against the snow, holding his hand, letting the power flow from body to body, from slim alien to tall Earthman. *It is all a matter of channelling your desires,* he had said. *Any creature that thinks can learn how to assert its will. The technique is simple.*

Lily lowered her head. After a moment, she raised it. She was smiling.

"IT WON'T last a month," Richardson Elliott grunted, at the

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sight of the announcement in the paper.

"The poor dumb bastard," Jim Thorne said, reading the news at his Martian ranch. "Falling in love with a dream-Lily that never existed, and actually marrying her. She'll suck him dry."

On nine worlds, people read the story and talked about it. Many of them were pleased; it was the proper finish for the storybook courtship. But those who knew Lily Leigh were less happy about it. "She's got some angle," they said. "It's all a publicity stunt. She'll drop him as soon as the fanfare dies down. And she'll drop him so hard he won't ever get up."

Burkhardt and Lily were married on the tenth day after his return from space. It was a civil ceremony, held secretly. Their honeymoon trip was shrouded in mystery. While they were gone, gossip columnists speculated. How could the brittle, sophisticated, much-married Lily be happy with a simple farmer from a colony-world?

Two days after their return to Earth from the honeymoon, Burkhardt and his wife held a joint press conference. It lasted only five minutes. Burkhardt, holding his wife's hand tightly, said, "I'm happy to announce that Miss Leigh is distributing all of her possessions to charity. We've both signed up as indentured colonists and we're leaving for Novotny IX tomorrow."

"Really, Miss Leigh?"

"Yes," Lily said. "I belong at John's side. We'll work his old farm together. It'll be the first useful thing I've ever done in my life."

The newsmen, thunderstruck, scattered to shout their story to the waiting worlds. Mr. and Mrs. John Burkhardt closed the door behind them.

"Happy?" Burkhardt asked.

Lily nodded. She was still smiling. Burkhardt, watching her closely, saw the momentary flicker of her eyes, the brief clearing-away of the cloud that shrouded them—as though someone were trapped behind those lovely eyes, struggling to get out. But Burkhardt's control never lapsed. Bending, he kissed her soft lips lightly.

"Bedtime," he said.

"Yes. Bedtime."

Burkhardt kissed her again. Donnoi had been right, he thought. Control was possible. He had channelled desire eighteen years, and now Lily was his. Perhaps she was no longer Lily as men had known her, but what did that matter? She was the Lily of his lonely dreams. He had created her in the tingling moment of a handshake, from the raw material of her old self.

He turned off the light and began to undress. He thought with cozy pleasure that in only a few weeks he would be setting foot once again on the bleak tundra of Novotny IX—this time, with his loving bride. ★

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CRAIG STRETE

THE BLEEDING MAN

The medicine shaker, the bone breaker. I have seen and been all these. It is nothing but trouble.

I have sat on the good side of the fire. I have cried over young women. It is nothing but trouble.

Miss Dow leaned against the observation window. Her stomach revolted and she backed away. Unable to quell the nausea rising within her she clamped a hand to her mouth.

Dr. Santell gently took her arm, led her away from the window and helped her to a couch facing away from the observation window.

Nausea passed; Miss Dow smiled weakly. "You did warn me," she said.

Dr. Santell did not return the smile. "It takes getting used to. I'm a doctor and immune to gore, but still I find it unsettling. He's a biological impossibility."

"Not even human," Miss Dow suggested.

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"That's what the government sent you here to decide," said Dr. Santell. "Frankly, I'm glad he's no longer my responsibility."

"I want to look at him again."

Santell shrugged, lit a syntho. Together they walked back to the observation window. He seemed amused at her discomfort.

Again, Miss Dow peered through the window. This time it was easier.

A young man, tall and well-muscled, stood in the middle of the room. He was naked. His uncut black hair fell to the small of his back.

His chest was slit with a gaping wound that bled profusely; his legs and stomach were soaked with blood.

"Why is he smiling? What is he staring at?" she asked, unable to take her eyes off the figure before her.

"I don't know," said Dr. Santell. "Why don't you ask him."

"Your sense of humor escapes me," said Miss Dow through tightly closed lips.

Dr. Santell grinned and shrugged. His synthetic cigarette reached the cut-off mark and winked out. The butt flashed briefly as he tossed it into the wall disposal.

"Doesn't everything?" suggested Dr. Santell, trying not to laugh at his little joke.

Miss Dow turned away from the window. Her look was sharp, withering. "Tell me about him," she snapped, each word like ice. "How did he get—that way?"

His amusement faded. He licked his lips nervously, nodded. "He has no name, at least no official name. We call him Joe. Sort of a nickname. We gave him that name about—"

"Fascinating," interrupted Miss Dow, "but I didn't come here to be entertained by some droll little tale about his nickname."

"Friendly, aren't you?" asked Santell, drily. A pity, he thought. If she knew how to smile she might have seemed attractive.

"The government doesn't pay me to be friendly. It pays me to do a job." Her voice was cold, dispassionate. But she turned to face Dr. Santell in such a way that she would not see the bleeding man. "How long has he been like this?"

"It's all in my report. If you'd like to read it I could—"

"I'd prefer a verbal outline first. I'll read your report later; I trust that it is a thorough one." She eyed him sharply.

"Yes, quite thorough," Dr. Santell replied, the polite edge in his voice wearing thin.

He turned away from Miss Dow, gazed in at the bleeding man. His words were clipped, impartial. "He is approximately twenty-three years old and has been as he is now since birth."

"Incredible!" said Miss Dow, fascinated in spite of herself. "All this is documented?"

"Completely. There is no possi-

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bility of fakery. Nor point either, for that matter."

"Just as you say," echoed Miss Dow, "what have you done to try to cure it? Is it some form of stigmata?"

Dr. Santell shook his head. "If this is stigmata, it is the most extreme case this world will ever see. Besides, it is inconceivable that a psychosomatic illness could cause such a drastic biological malfunction."

"But surely some sort of surgery?" began Miss Dow. "Some sort of chemical therapy would—"

Dr. Santell shook his head emphatically. "We've tried them all in the seven years he's been here. Psycho-chemistry, primal reconditioning, bio-feedback-tried singly and together; none have had any effect. He's a biological impossibility."

"What is his rate of bleeding?" she asked.

"It varies," said Dr. Santell. "Somewhere between two and three pints an hour."

"But it's not possible!" exclaimed Miss Dow. "No one can—"

"He can and does," interrupted Dr. Santell. "He doesn't do anything normally. I can give you ten reasons why he should be dead. Don't ask me why he isn't."

Miss Dow turned her head around and stared at the silent figure standing in the center of the room. The bleeding man had not moved. The blood flowed evenly from the chest wound, gathering in a coagulating pool at his feet.

"I've had enough." She turned away from the window. "Show me to my office. I'm ready to read that report now."

Two hours later, the last page of Dr. Santell's report slipped from nerveless fingers. The bleeding man lay outside the parameters of human biology. By all rights he should have been dead, indeed, could never have lived. Her hands were a little unsteady as she punched in Dr. Santell's office on the videophone. His face appeared on the screen—and it was flushed.

"Report to me immediately," Miss Dow snapped.

"I doubt it, sweetheart," said Dr. Santell, grinning. "I'm off the case, remember?" He drank something out of a dark tumbler.

"You're drinking!" snapped Miss Dow.

"Now that you mention it," admitted Dr. Santell agreeably. He gave her a lopsided grin. "Perhaps you would care to join me?"

"You are a disgusting, undisciplined lout. And I should like to remind you that you are still responsible to me. You may be discharged from this case in your professional capacity, but your standing orders are to cooperate with me in any way possible."

"So I'm cooperating," muttered Dr. Santell. "I'll stay out of your way, you stay out of mine."

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"I won't tolerate this!" she raged. "Do you realize to whom you are talking?"

Dr. Santell thought that over slowly. His face tightened. He did realize who she was. It sobered him a little. He took another drink from the tumbler to compensate.

"Are you sober enough to answer a few questions?"

He thought that over for a while too. "I'm drunk enough to answer any questions you have. I don't think I could answer them sober," he said.

"I am trying to be understanding," said Miss Dow, a note of conciliation in her voice. "I realize it is quite natural for you to resent me. After all, I am responsible for your termination at this installation."

Dr. Santell shrugged it off. He took another drink from the tumbler.

"We're both professionals, Dr. Santell," reasoned Miss Dow. "We can't let emotional considerations enter into this. There is no place for emotion here. Our goals must be—"

"Hell! That's easy for you to say!" growled Dr. Santell. "You don't have any!"

"That's quite enough, thank you," said Miss Dow, pressing her lips together in a tight, angry line.

"No, it's not enough—" started Dr. Santell. "You can't—"

"The subject is closed!" she shouted.

There was an uneasy silence.

Miss Dow broke it by changing the subject. "What about his parents?" she asked.

"Didn't you read my report?"

"It said they committed suicide. It did not specify or go into any details. I have to know more than that. Your report was supposed to be thorough. You didn't list your sources of information on his early life, for one thing. I need to know—"

"Ask Nahtari. He can tell you everything," he said. He shrugged as if to say it was out of his hands.

"Who?"

"Nahtari. His uncle. He comes every week to visit his nephew. Nahtari used to exhibit him at the carnival until we discovered him and brought him here. If you'll turn to the financial report near the back, you will see that we pay him a small gratuity for the privilege of studying his nephew. We pay him by the week and he stops in to pick up his check and talk to his relative."

"Did you say he talks to his relative?"

"Yeah. It's pretty strange. Nahtari talks to Joe every week for an hour. I don't know if Joe understands anything that is said to him or even if Nahtari cares if he understands. I've never heard Joe respond in any way, not in the seven years I've been here."

"When does this Nahtari make his weekly visit?"

"He's here now in my office. He

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brings me a pint of whiskey every week. Makes it himself. You'd never believe how good—"

Miss Dow hit the dial-out button viciously, cutting him off in mid-sentence.

She pushed the door open to Dr. Santell's office. She hadn't bothered to knock. Dr. Santell had his feet propped up on the edge of his desk. He held a drink in one hand and a deck of cards in the other. Across the desk from him sat a grey headed Indian dressed in faded blue jeans, cracked leather boots and a tattered flannel shirt.

"I'll see your dime and raise you a dime," said Dr. Santell, slamming a dime onto the pile of change on the desk between them.

"Are you Nahtari?" demanded Miss Dow, coming into the room. The two studiously ignored her.

"It depends," said the old Indian, not looking up from his cards. "I'll meet your dime and raise you a quarter."

Dr. Santell bit his lip. "You're bluffing! I know you don't have that other ace!"

Miss Dow marched up to the desk, snatched the cards out of Dr. Santell's hands.

Dr. Santell pounded his desk in anger. "Stupid bitch! I had him beat!" He tried to collect the torn cards in his lap.

"Is she some kind of nut?" asked Nahtari, holding his cards out of harm's way.

Dr. Santell dumped the torn pieces of cards on the top of the desk and sighed. "Yeah. A government nut. She's in charge of Joe now."

Nahtari scowled and laid his cards face up on the desk. "And that means she wants to ask me about my relative."

"It certainly does," said Miss Dow. "Would you like to come to my office?"

Nahtari shrugged. There seemed to be no way to avoid it.

"You are owing me twelve dollars," he said to Dr. Santell as he rose to leave the room.

"Don't I always," growled Dr. Santell, staring at the ace that Nahtari had had after all.

"Sit down, Nahtari. This may take a while. I have a great many questions I want to ask you." She put a new cartridge in her tape machine and turned it on.

"If Dr. Santell had taken down all facts from before when I tell him I would not having to be saying again," said Nahtari. "I get tired of telling the story and having no one taking down so I don't have to do all over again."

Miss Dow patted the tape machine. "Don't worry about it," she assured him. "This recorder will make a permanent record of everything you say. I guarantee you won't have to tell it again."

"You going to listen and take down no matter what?"

"Every word," she replied.

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She started to ask a question but Nahtari held up his hand. "Let me tell whole story," said Nahtari. "It will be a saving of time and you can ask questions after if you have any. I want to get this over before too long. Got to catch Dr. Santell before he leave with my twelve dollar."

Nahtari scratched his chest over his right shirt pocket.

"That sounds all right to me," agreed Miss Dow. "Could you start with his parents? I'd like to know—"

"He killed them."

"What?" Miss Dow was stunned.

"He killed them," repeated Nahtari matter-of-factly. "I was there the day he was born. His father and mother died within an hour of his birthing. He killed them."

Miss Dow was confused. "But how did it happen? How could—"

"You was not going to ask questions until I finished," accused Nahtari, dragging the back of his hand insolently across his nose.

Miss Dow settled back into her seat with a tight-lipped smile. She motioned for him to continue.

"His parents were medicine people. They were people of great power. My brother was one of the strong ones. They had this child stronger than them."

Miss Dow made a face. "You don't expect me to believe in primitive super—"

"I am expecting of you to keep your stupid mouth shut so this telling can be done and over with. I want to tell this so you will no longer pester me when I come to see my relative. I know all of your kind of government people. You harass a person—"

"Tell the story!" rasped Miss Dow. "For Christ sakes, just tell the story!" She drummed her fingers impatiently on the desk.

"My brother and his woman were filled with the sickness of the world. I knew that my brother did not want to live. His wife knew this and was content to go with them. Then when they had decided the road, she became heavy with child. They had no expecting of this. They became uncertain and did not know the way. But they could not change their decision for the living of the child. They went into the mountains, looking for their road. It was in the fifth month of the child in her belly."

Miss Dow sighed impatiently and settled back in her chair. It looked to be a long story, unrestricted by the inclusion of anything factual. Already she regretted asking him for information.

"They were high in the mountains. They laid down for dying but something strange happened. The child began speaking to them. The child was angry. They ran to the high places, to throw themselves off before the power of the child got too strong for them. But the child stopped them at the edge of the cliff and turned them around. The child

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forced them back down the mountain. And for four months, they were prisoners of the child."

"Are you seriously telling me that—" began Miss Dow with disgust.

Nahtari snorted contemptuously and passed his hands in front of his eyes. His eyes seemed to be focused on some far horizon. His voice mocked hers. "I just had a vision. I saw you and Dr. Santell embraced upon the ground and then suddenly crushed by a falling outhouse."

"I'm not laughing," said Miss Dow. She wasn't laughing.

"Somebody is," said Nahtari with a straight face. "I knew you was going to not let me finish the story and take it all down so I don't have to tell it again. Nobody ever lets me finish my story," complained Nahtari.

"Christ! I don't blame them!" said Miss Dow. "I've never heard such an outrageous piece of trash." She turned the tape machine off. "You may have all the time in the world, but I haven't got time to listen to this idiocy!" She stood up and marched around the desk. "When you leave, shut the door."

Nahtari came around the desk and sat down in her chair. He tilted the chair back and rested his bootheels on the desk. He turned the tape recorder microphone around so that it pointed at him. He pushed the recording button and began talking into the machine.

"You bet this time, record is made of all the facts," he said and went on with the story. "For four months, they were prisoners of the child. Five days before he was born, the child began to fear leaving the belly. The fear did not last long but it lasted long enough for his father to put poison in their food without the child's knowing. They ate this poison, the mother, the father and the child.

"The child felt the poison and changed it into water in his belly. He felt great sadness in his heart and an anger because they did not want him to live. They did not want him born into a world they had grown sick of. It was not their right to choose for him because his power was greater than theirs. He did not change the poison flowing through them to water. His hatred was at them for they had let the world beat them. They began the agony of poison dying but they could not die.

"I sat with them through this time. I sat with my brother and my sister by law and they told me these things through their agony. They screamed to die but the child was punishing them for letting the world beat them. I, Nahtari, did not want to see the child born into this world. I feared his coming. There was nothing I could do. He came to birth.

"It was not a child like expected. He bled. His chest was bleeding. I had expected hot roaring fires. I had expected a child of frightful appearance. It was but a small

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baby that bled and could not talk.

"The father pulled the baby up and beat him into breathing. He laid the baby on the bed and went outside the house. After a little while, my sister by law got to her feet, swaying on dizzy legs, and she staggered out after him. I tried to stop the bleeding of the baby chest but I was too scared about my brother and sister by law. I ran outside. They laid side by side in the black dirt of the garden. They were dead and five days decayed.

"I took the little one into my home but the bleeding sickened my old woman and she died. So I took the bleeding one to the traveling show. The white people there did not sicken and die at the sight of his bleeding.

"In lines all around the tent they would stand to pay good money to see the bleeding one. They all wanted to see him bleeding and they were not sickened by it and they did not die. But the government people came and took the bleeding man from me and made me sign little pieces of paper and gave me money so they could do what they do. I turned him over to the government ones and that is all there is to the story and it is the truth.

"Now I come every week to talk to him. I know he is too powerful to have a name. I am waiting for him. I am telling so I will not have to tell it again and so that this warning is given to all who would have dealings with him. He is not ready to do what he will one day do. Do not walk in his shadow. Leave him alone for he is not you. For twenty-three years he has been gathering power. That is all I have to say."

He switched off the tape machine, smiling to himself because there was no one to hear it. He closed the door carefully behind him and went looking for Dr. Santell and his twelve dollars.

Miss Dow pushed open the door cautiously. She was not sure if she had the stomach for what she was doing. But making up her mind, she stepped into the room. She kept telling herself that he was perfectly harmless.

The drain in the center of the floor was stopped up with clotted blood. He stood in a shallow pool of his own blood. His body was motionless, his breathing just barely perceptible by a slight rising and falling of his chest. The blood flowed steadily to the floor.

"Can you hear me?" she asked nervously. She shut the door behind her. She kept her eyes on his face. He stared at her but gave no sign that he had heard her. He seemed to be in no pain, despite the stream of blood flowing down his chest.

"I'm not going to hurt you." She approached him slowly with a small, glass lab beaker. Averting her eyes slightly, she placed the glass container below the wound.

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She felt a little foolish for having spoken to him. It was obvious to her now that he was little better than a cretin and that he could not understand a word she said.

She stood there awkwardly, the glass beaker filling with his blood. The naked man seemed unaware of her presence, yet still she felt an unreasonable fear. There was something frightening about the still figure. Something threatening, otherworldly in the steady flow of blood down his chest. He did not seem vulnerable. Rather it was as if the world were too insignificant for him to notice it.

She backed away with a full glass of his blood. She felt better with each step she took. He stared at her, no expression on his face, his eyes unusually bright. She had felt very uncomfortable under his stare.

Miss Dow had turned and started out the door, watching him all the while. Suddenly he moved. She turned quickly. Fear rose in her like a tide. The bleeding man cupped a hand beneath the wound in his chest.

Slowly, he brought his hands to his lips and drank. Miss Dow fainted.

DR. SANTELL found her in the doorway. A tiny, red pool of fresh blood was beginning to blacken on the floor beside her head. The glass beaker she had brought into the room was gone. "What happened?" asked Dr. Santell, bending over the couch, his voice oddly gentle despite its gruffness. "Here—take a sip of this," he said, offering her a small glass of whiskey. "It'll steady your nerves."

She was too weak to refuse. The whiskey burned her throat and made her cough. He made her take another sip. It almost made her gag but it seemed to help. A touch of color reappeared in her face.

"He—he—he drank his own blood!" she whispered, tottering on the edge of hysteria.

Dr. Santell leaned forward eagerly. His features sharpened, his manner became intent and forceful. "Are you sure?" he demanded.

"Yes, I'm sure," she said with a trace of her normal sharpness.

"Are you sure—absolutely sure—he drank his own blood?" he asked again, impatiently. The answer seemed unusually important to him.

"Of course, I'm sure, damn it! It was absolutely disgusting!" She wrinkled up her nose. "That revolting animal did it on purpose! Just because I collected a beaker of—"

Dr. Santell suddenly became greatly agitated. "You collected a glass of blood?" he husked.

She nodded, bewildered by his strange behavior.

"God! It's happened again," he muttered. "It's happened again!" A look of dread passed over his face.

"What the devil are you talking about?" demanded Miss Dow.

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"When I heard you scream, I started running. I was the first one to reach you. You were sprawled in the doorway. There was a big bloodstain beside your head on the floor. There was no glass on the floor of the room and it wasn't in the hallway."

"Don't be ridiculous! I had it with me. Isn't this an awfully big fuss to be making over a—"

Dr. Santell turned his back on her and dialed security.

"Hobeman? This is Santell. Have room 473 searched for a glass beaker. Delay his feeding time if you have to, but find that beaker!" He shut off the view screen.

He looked at Miss Dow. Her face was blank with bewilderment. Before she could ask a question he began, "Something strange has developed in the last few weeks. Our monitors have been picking up unusual activity levels. They aren't sophisticated enough to tell us exactly what's happening but his heartbeat and galvanic skin responses have been fluctuating wildly."

"But what does that have to do with the glass?" asked Miss Dow.

"I'm coming to that. A week ago, during one of his strange activity levels, the observation port on the wall of his room disappeared."

Miss Dow's face registered shock. "Disappeared? How is that possible?"

Dr. Santell was grim. "I have no idea. We found traces of melted glass on the floor of the room. But what disturbs me the most is that we could detect no coronary activity. For two hours his blood was circulating but his heart wasn't functioning."

"He's not human, is he?" said Miss Dow.

"I don't know," said Dr. Santell, staring off into space. "I just don't know."

HE PUSHED the carts through the door. The bleeding man stared at him as he had stared for the seven years he had been there.

"Soup's on, Joe," said the man with the feeding carts.

Two men hidden from view by the door, were examining two streaks of melted glass on the floor.

"Hey, hold up there," said one of the men. "He's not to be fed until we've finished our search."

"I won't get in the way. What's disappeared this time?"

"Nothing important," grumbled one of the men. "Just a glass jar from the lab."

"Shame on you, Joe," said the cartman, waving a finger at the motionless figure in the center of the room. "You oughten to be stealing stuff like that." He opened the top of his cart and took out a pair of gloves.

"It won't hurt if I feed him will it? I don't have to hose him down until you guys have finished," he said, pulling the gloves over his hands.

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"Go ahead. We aren't going to find anything anyway."

The cart man opened a panel on the side of the cart and brought out a bowl of raw meat. He sat it on the floor in front of the bleeding man. From the other cart he got a large bowl of uncooked vegetables and a large wooden ladle.

He detached a water hose from the wall and started backing toward the bleeding man, uncoiling the hose as he walked. When he got to the end of the hose, he turned around.

The bleeding man had overturned the feeding bowls with his feet. He was drinking his own blood from cupped hands.

"THIS is what you are looking for," said Dr. Santell, handing Miss Dow a clipboard. "His blood type is O lateral. We've run hundreds of tests on it and it seems to be perfectly normal blood, a little more resistant to some diseases than ordinary blood but otherwise normal. It's too bad the government won't let us use his blood. He's a universal donor and at the rate he produces blood, I'll bet he could supply Intercity all by himself."

"But that's just the point. We *are* going to use his blood," said Miss Dow. "We are going to use his blood," said Miss Dow. "We are going to use a lot more besides. That's why I was sent here."

"The government's changed its policy, then?" asked Dr. Santell. "Why?"

"We've given transfusions of his blood to prisoners and it seems to have no bad effects. Tell me, you've studied him for seven years. Do you have any idea how something like him is possible?"

Dr. Santell lit a synthetic cigarette slowly. He gave her a curious look.

"Did you listen to Nahtari's explanation?"

"That lunacy," sniffed Miss Dow. "I think we should pay a little more attention to a chromosomal mutation theory than some wild story from some primitive like Nahtari."

Dr. Santell shrugged. "It doesn't really matter what caused it. I couldn't even make an educated guess. His version is the only evidence we have."

"Confine yourself to specifics, please," said Miss Dow. "What biological evidence do we have?"

"There is biological evidence pointing to chromosomal differentiation. He has sixty-four paired chromosomes. I have been unable so far to determine their exact structure. He seems to have all the normal ones. Technically, that makes him a member of our species, I suppose. But it's those extra chromosomes that are so unusual. They seem to be entirely new structures unlike anything we are familiar with. It must be something outside our experience. I think I

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pointed this out in more detail in my report."

"But technically, he is human?" asked Miss Dow.

"I would say he is," said Dr. Santell.

"Very well. Then I am going to give the final go-ahead on this project," said Miss Dow.

"And what project is that?"

"We're going to transfer him to the military dome at Intercity where he will be dissected for tissue regeneration. Hopefully, his cellular matrix will produce like functioning biological constructs."

"What!" Dr. Santell jumped to his feet. "You're not serious! That would be murder! Matrix reconstruction from tissue cultures has never advanced beyond the experimental stage! We don't have the technology to stimulate the reproduction of brain and nerve tissue! Good lord, woman, you can't seriously—"

"I am quite aware of our shortcomings in the field of tissue regeneration," said Miss Dow coldly. "For years, our work in this area has been little better than a waste of time and materials. We have yet to produce a successful unit with a well-developed nervous system. Nor have we been able to successfully clone an individual. These matters, however, are not relevant to this case."

"Not relevant! You'll kill him! And to what purpose? A line of research that you yourself admitted has been a waste of time!" stormed Dr. Santell, his face flushed with anger.

"Be careful, Dr. Santell," she cautioned him. "I don't think I am happy with your choice of words. We are not going to kill him. Many of our first tissue regeneration experiments are still alive—alive after a fashion, that is. Their bodies still function, their cells still grow, it is only their minds that are dead." She smiled.

"It's still murder! You have no right!" Dr. Santell looked away from Miss Dow. He had suddenly realized that the things he was saying could be considered treason.

"When's the last time you had an attitude check, Dr. Santell?" asked Miss Dow. "I almost thought I heard you say something that was opposed to the wishes of our government. You did agree that my patient can be made ready for transport tomorrow morning, didn't you?"

"Of course," said Dr. Santell. "He will be ready."

"And did I hear you use the word *murder,* Dr. Santell? I *did* hear you use the word! I'm sure General Talbot will be most interested in your attitude."

Dr. Santell turned and began walking out of the room. He knew that he was in trouble and nothing he could say would make it any better.

"Dr. Santell!"

He turned to look at her.

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"I'm really not hard to get along with," said Miss Dow. "You have the reputation of being a brilliant scientist. I've handled your type before. I am willing to overlook a small measure of eccentricity. But I draw the line at treason."

His expression remained blank.

"It's only natural that you're defensive about your patient after seven years," she soothed. "You have personalized him, lost your objectivity. But you must know as well as I do that the bleeding man is a brainless vegetable, hopelessly retarded since birth. You can see that, surely?"

Dr. Santell stared wordlessly.

"It would be a lot easier for me," she continued, "if I had your cooperation on this thing. You've had seven years experience on this project and you could help us smooth over any rough spots we might encounter. This isn't exactly a normal case. It will require special procedures. Procedures that your cooperation will make possible." She smiled at him. "My report could be a very positive one. It depends on you."

Dr. Santell forced himself to smile. "Believe me," he said, "I shall cooperate in any way I can. I apologize for my behavior."

Miss Dow nodded. "Good. Now, how much blood could, let's say, ten of his regenerations, produce in a forty-eight hour period?"

Dr. Santell began punching up figures on his desk calculator.

THE bleeding man continued to drink. The men studying the glass streaks on the floor had fled.

A security guard unlocked the door and looked into the room. The bleeding man did not seem aware of the other's presence. A call went out for Dr. Santell.

Dr. Santell, followed by Miss Dow, arrived just in time to see the heavy door buckling outward.

"He's gone berserk!" screamed Miss Dow, as the door was battered off its hinges. The bleeding man walked through the wreckage of the door. He advanced upon them, a crimson trail of blood behind him on the floor.

Miss Dow fled, screaming. Dr. Santell stood his ground. The bleeding man brushed him lightly as he walked past. He looked neither to left or right. He strode down the corridor, moving quickly, relentlessly.

Dr. Santell ran in front of him and tried to push him to a halt. His hands slipped, coming away blood soaked. His efforts to stop him were futile. Through the plasti-glass corridor walls he could see the security guards gathering around Miss Dow at the corridor exit. Dr. Santell took hold of the bleeding man's arm and tried to drag him to a stop but found himself being dragged instead. The bleeding man did not even break stride.

Miss Dow stood within a cordon of security men. Dr. Santell knew what she would order them to do.

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even before the bleeding man smashed through the exit door.

"Aim for his head!" she shouted.

A burst of stunner fire took the bleeding man full in the face. He walked several steps, then toppled.

Dr. Santell rushed to his side and put a hand on his chest. "He's still alive," he muttered to himself.

"Good shooting, men," congratulated Miss Dow. "A couple of you men carry the body down to the lab."

"Is there very much damage to his head?" she asked. "Is he still alive? Not that it matters. We can't risk another episode like this. We might as well do the dissection here. It'll make him easier to handle. We'd have to ship him frozen anyway now that we know more about his capabilities."

The security men carried the body away.

"He's still alive," Dr. Santell said, pronouncing each word slowly and distinctly. "He's very much alive."

Miss Dow had a surgical gown on and a mask. "Are you sure you can handle the dissection all by yourself, Dr. Santell? I could fly someone in to assist."

"Quite sure," said Dr. Santell, bending over the still form on the surgery table. "I'll begin soon. You'd better leave now."

"I'll be waiting at the military base in Intercity for the body," said Miss Dow. She came over to the table and stood beside him. Her voice was cold and emotionless as usual. "You realize I still must report your treasonable remarks to General Talbot."

Dr. Santell nodded, not looking in her direction.

"However, your behavior has shown marked improvement. That too will be noted in my report. Trying to stop this creature singlehandedly in the corridor like you did was a very brave if somewhat foolish thing to do. You realize of course that the matter is out of my hands. General Talbot will be the one deciding, not I. Perhaps, after a short period of retraining, you may even be reassigned. A man of your reputation, I'm sure, will find it very easy to rejoin the fold. Only a fool—or a traitor—bucks the system."

Dr. Santell seemed not to be listening. He stuck a needle into the arm of the body on the dissection table.

"What a shame a body like tht should have no mind," mused Miss Dow. "Just think of the power he must have in order to smash through those doors like he did."

"Yes," Dr. Santell replied tonelessly.

Miss Dow pulled her mask off and turned to leave.

"Wait," said Dr. Santell. "Before you go, could you hand me that box of clamps under the table here?"

She bent over and looked under

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the table. "I don't see any—"

His scalpel sliced through her right carotid artery. Her body jerked convulsively and she crashed heavily to the floor.

"Yes," said Dr. Santell with a strange look on his face. "It is always a shame to find a good body with a defective mind."

It took him a little over two hours to dissect her. By the time he finished, the stimulant he had injected into him had brought the bleeding man back to consciousness.

As he was putting her dismembered body into the liquid nitrogen packs for shipping, he kept his eyes on the body of the bleeding man. The body sat up slowly and opened its eyes. The head swiveled and the eyes regarded him. The eyes were alive with raw intelligence. The body slid off the table gracefully and stood up, the wound on his chest completely healed.

"I knew," said Dr. Santell. "I knew."

> The medicine shaker, the bone breaker. I have seen and been all these. It is nothing but trouble.
>
> I have sat on the good side of the fire. I have cried over young women. It is nothing but trouble.
>
> These are the words I heard written in his skin. He made me kill her. I had to do it. I am not sorry. I knew. That is enough. knowing. —Paul Santell

(*This suicide note was found near the charred body of Dr. Paul Santell, who Intercity Police say, apparently soaked himself with an inflammable liquid and then set himself afire. Dr. Paul Santell, twice recipient of the Nobel Prize in psycho-chemistry, police report had been experiencing . . .* —excerpt from *Intercity Demographic Area Telepaper.*)

THE bleeding man cured of bleeding, walked without haste toward the door leading outside. He remembered the taste of blood, he who no longer had need of it. He pushed the door open and stepped outside. The sky pulled at him but he resisted for that last little moment. His feet touched the ground. His lungs filled with air. His eyes danced on the horizons of the world. Raising his hands into the air, he let the sky pull him away from the earth. He took the air in his lungs and thrust it out with a shout. Silently his lips formed words.

And then he had no more need of air and words. His fingers curled into the hands of the sky. He disappeared in a cloud.

He Who No Longer Bleeds is gone. He will return. To bleed again. ★

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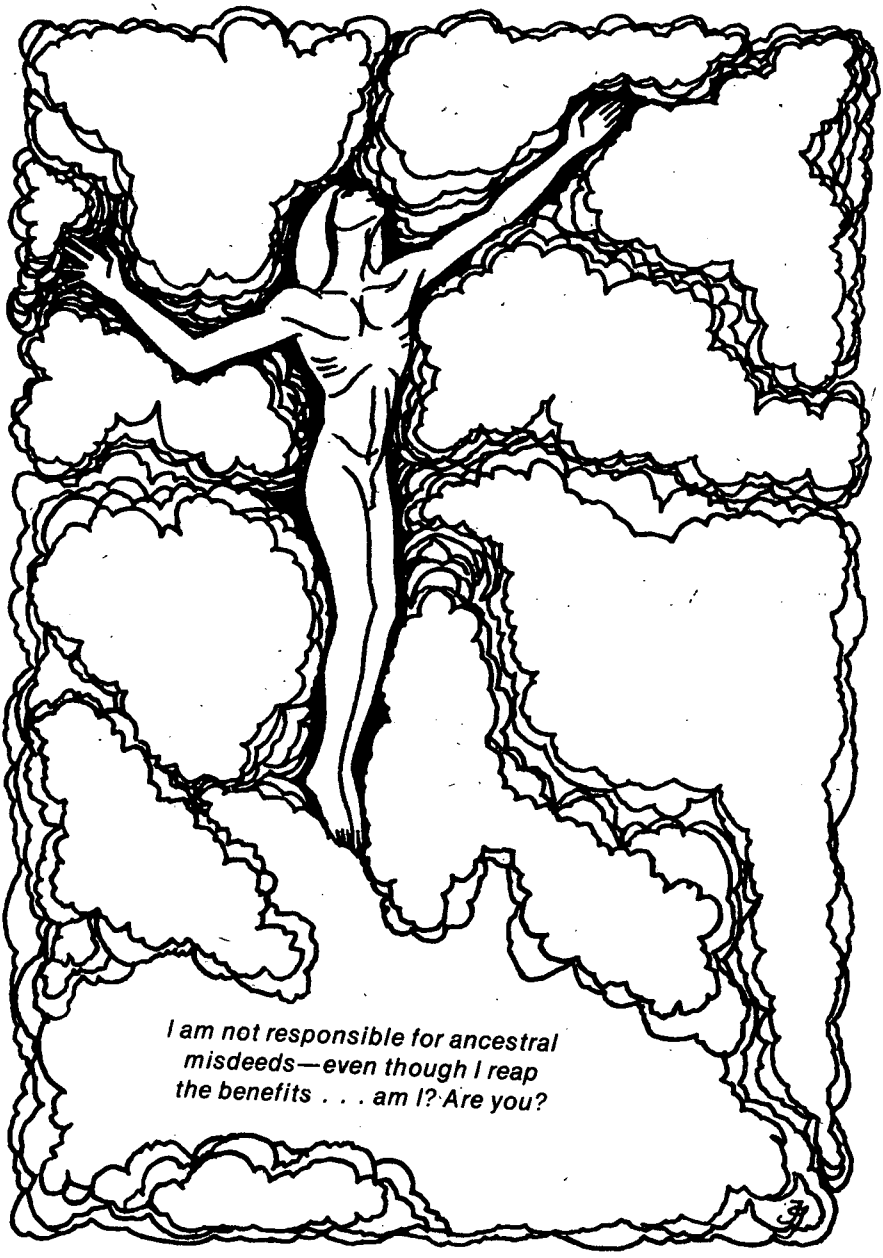

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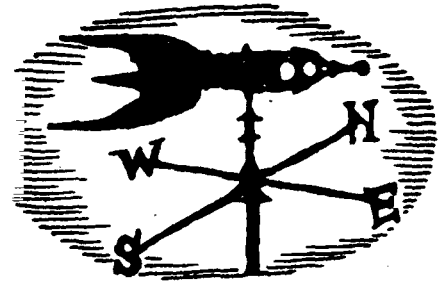

DIRECTIONS

Dear Jim,

I'd appreciate it if you'd run the following letter for me. I don't think science fiction writers ought lightly to get involved in politics, but this is an issue close to most of our readers, and one I think we'll have universal agreement on.

If you eat tuna fish, think about changing diets. For hundreds of years tuna were caught by hook and line, but in the last decade "porpoise fishing" for tuna became widespread and is now nearly universal. This involves using speedboats to terrify dolphins into entering purse seine nets. The tuna follow the terrified dolphins.

The net is then drawn closed, and the result is unimaginably cruel to the dolphins. Most of them don't survive the experience. In 1972 Congress passed a law protecting dolphins, and a new kind of net that reduced fatalities from millions to merely hundreds of thousands of dolphins was introduced. I'm told there's now a net that gets it down to maybe a dolphin per ton of tuna, which means you haven't contributed to more than a small percent of the murder of a dolphin when you buy a can of tuna—but isn't that too many?

If you like tuna but don't like dead dolphins, albacore and skipjack are still caught by methods not involving "porpoise fishing," but those are hard to find.

And if you're upset about this, you might write your Congressman and demand that something be done about it. I understand Congress is considering a law that will let tuna fishers buy a license to kill dolphins in connection with their fishing.

I try to be a reasonable man, and I recall many friends who were fishing boat captains when I lived in Seattle. They aren't evil, but they have to make a living. So long as anyone is allowed to use "porpoise fishing," then everyone who wants to stay in the fishing business must, because it is just so much more effective than the old methods.

And certainly any effective restriction on the tuna industry that makes them stop killing dolphins as part of their catching system will raise the price of tuna considerably. Me, I'm willing to pay a dime a can more if they'll leave our sea-going cousins alone—and thinks naive me, so would almost everyone in the U.S. if they knew about it.

You can learn more about this by sending $3.00 to "The Porpoise News," 1945 Twentieth Ave., San Francisco, Calif. 94116.

Jerry Pournelle, Ph.D.

More than happy to run such a letter. Although fishermen may not

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know any better, Congressmen, by God, should. Murder it is, and murder most foul.

Dear Editor,

With the exception of Heinlein, and a very few others, sf today seldom measures up to the high standards of the fifties. I can think of a lot of reasons why this is so, but would like to share just a few of these reasons with you.

The first reason why today's sf is generally inferior is that some of it is highly experimental in form or concept. Eventually the art of sf will be advanced by these experiments, but for now we'll have to suffer through them.

Another reason for the inferior sf seems to be that authors are not so content to be entertainers, but are reaching—and overreaching—for the Big Concept. To be both a graet writer and an outstanding Big-Concept-person is extremely rare, but the authors do not know this, or think that they are exceptions.

Still another reason for inferior sf seems to be the desire to imitate Leiber and Tolkien—and alas, the imitations are worse than blank pages. These imitations seem to combine with a love for the middle ages or the renaissance. So we have jarring cases of medieval societies on other planets or in the future. A man rides up to a castle on a horse and pulls out his laser gun, or perhaps some other unbelievable mixture of two technologies occurs.

Perhaps editors are also at fault for the low estate of sf at present. I hesitate to say that, because I know an editor has to be awfully sharp just to keep a magazine operating at a profit. Anyone can write, more or less, but no one is an editor-more or-less; an editor either cuts the mustard or his magazine goes under. Precious few mortals can do it. Yet I suspect that, among the thousands of manuscripts that *Galaxy* receives each year, there must be three-hundred or so that I'd much prefer to read, rather than those actually published. Could it be that editors become too sophisticated? Could it be that a panel of sf fans would choose to publish manuscripts that would delight the public and make editors vomit? Perhaps an editor should set up such a panel and find out.

I really do not mind when an author inserts a bit of the occult or ESP, but wish he would take special care to make it believable.

The kind of sf that I like to read has clarity; one does not have to read the last half of the story in order to understand the first half. Nor does one have to put a lot of clues together to make sense of the piece. The story may not present a conflict or problem (a conflict or problem usually helps the story along), but it should be fun and interesting to read from the beginning through the middle to the end. I am not satisfied with a story just because it has a terrific ending, no matter how carefully the ending has been prepared by the story as a whole.

Much of the sf of today is so tedious, I cannot imagine even the authors writing it with any pleasure. Heinlein, in his speech at the Naval Academy, said: "If it bores me, I don't write it." The other authors should take that

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statement to heart!

Mark Terry
P.O. Box 2786
San Diego, Ca. 92112

I think you are about 70% (60%) correct, and I hope Galaxy/IF *reflects this. However, consider: by the nature of things the readership of this and every magazine represents a spectrum of tastes, and what you love someone else might think shallow and done-to-death. Or the reverse might be true.*

Personally, I go for action-adventure stories with a philosophical foundation, and which contain a valid scientific postulate integral to the plot, and which have believable characters with whom I can form a "relationship." And, of course, the author must write clean, concise prose which nonetheless has a degree of elegance . . . I don't get many stories like that.

Dear Mr. Baen:

In your September issue, Mr. Pournelle commented on building materials in his article "A Step Farther Out." He asks why we are so concerned with iron and steel since aluminum is so plentiful and notes that fiberglass and plastics haven't begun to be exploited. In the case of the latter materials he feels that building codes have not caught up with technology.

Actually, building codes are largely responsible in both instances. Remember that the reason for the building code is public safety. This is primarily expressed in concern for structural adequacy and fire safety. Although aluminum has replaced steel and other metals to an enormous extent in modern construction, its physical properties have placed a limit on its use. I know of no architect or builder who would not be overjoyed at being offered aluminum door or window openings that would pass standard fire tests. Ignoring any weight/strength/cost factors, further structural use of aluminum is possible now, but it fails in one very large and important area. Aluminum does not successfully interact with concrete (still one of our least expensive, most flexible, and available materials) to provide that special strength, fire resistance, durability and economy that ferroconcrete construction offers. Also, no available aluminum alloy can substitute for stainless steel in corrosion resistance.

Despite opposition from affected groups, the code acceptance of plastics has increased greatly in the last few years. In several instances performance has not lived up to the requirements and this has delayed further acceptance. The problem is still one of technology. Better combinations of physical properties are needed. Aging sometimes produces unfortunate effects in either appearance or durability. A material may offer many desirable features but prove hazardous in an actual fire. A great substitute for glass can not take standard maintenance practices. I am sure that composite materials have a great future but we are waiting for better products and for more information, especially on the effects of time and on the results of fuller and more realistic testing procedures.

Very truly yours,

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Mitchell Robinson, AIA
440 N. La Brea Ave.
Los Angeles, Calif. 90036

Jerry's reply follows:

I believe my column made it clear I was speaking of plastics, fiberglass, and composites as being hampered by lagging codes; although it took long enough to get codes revised to allow exploitation of aluminum. Nor did I blame codes as the only reason for application lagging technology, although a pretty good case can be made for their being a prime cause.

Mr. Robinson is as aware as I am that building codes are not primarily concerned with public safety (although certainly they must protect that) but with resale value and protection of moneylenders. Most housing is financed by someone other than the owner, and it is difficult to raise capital for a structure unless the lender can be certain the building will outlast the mortgage. Thus codes tend to be highly conservative, and rightly so.

However it has been my experience that they have been unduly conservative, even when the building is a single family residence, isolated from public access, and financed by the owner. An engineered house can be built only by someone determined enough to get through the maze of bureaucrats whose purpose is to enforce a code designed to protect moneylenders rather than either the public or the builder.

Because of this, a great deal of research into novel construction methods and techniques has been lost. Years ago I engaged in extensive correspondence with Frazier Formam Peters, a pioneer in the use of concrete in construction of private homes and perhaps the most important architect of stone "traditional" residences in our history; and problems with codes figure largely in that correspondence. (There is an allied difficulty, which is rules designed to protect construction trades unions, but that can of worms would take far too long to discuss, since there is right on both sides here as well as in the code situation.)

Mostly, my article was intended to point out that we've got plenty of construction materials left on Earth if only we'll be a bit more thoughtful about how to use them, and I'll let that conclusion stand.

Jerry Pournelle, Ph.D.

Dear Jim,

Congratulations on the August *Galaxy!* I liked just about everything in it, especially Ed Pangborn's yarn, *The Company of Glory.* (Mark Bilsen postulates the influence of W. H. Hudson on Pangborn's latest work; esp. *Die, The Craven City* (author's collection). His commentary has been published in the otherwise undistinguished June issue of his fanzine, *Alien Fwowup.* I do not hold with this thesis myself; the entire matter of deep exegesis needs to be more carefully gone into.

LeGuin is her usual charming mordant and disconcerting self in *The Day Before The Revolution.* The solemn word-painting in this exquisite portrait of a woman bomb thrower with a dicey heart is one

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that will remain with me long after I have forgotten the illo (is that one by Staffore?) which reaches hard for incisiveness but burns its fingers on the foreshortening-as-emotion.

The Pohl & Kornbluth is several steps above competent, but disappointing through its very effectiveness. (See my letter in the March Glitterglumph titled 'The Long-distance Sadness of the Competent Runner.'

R. C. Ritchie
Dalton, Georgia

Er . . . yes.

Dear Editor,

There is an old saying that all good things have an end. We of the sf world want to put off a mutation of our fiction toward vulnerability, dreading a final chapter for this *genre.* Surely, we say: let a hundred more flowers bloom; let the harvest outlast our day.

Nonetheless, many complex factors make up sf and nourish it. No man has been able to pin it down—who can assure us what is essential?

Both Baen and Bova, as well as the rest of the staffs, must often be reminded how sf magazines have prevailed so long. Strangely, they persist for decades, though specialized—and even general, like *LIFE*—magazines pass away. The magazines have been both ingredient and binding glue since 1926. Suppose they are the vital link?

If the magazines go down, admittedly the security and occupations of only a few could be spoiled. Established and veteran authors would continue with other markets; indeed the trends are proceeding now. But what if the magazines turned out to be the Goose that laid the Golden Eggs? Once they are killed, sf might dissolve into the general. No light would fall on its nature, only regret for seeing a wonder stifled.

Furthermore, readers would lose the stimulation of new entertainments; fiction would lack the stimulus of new authors that operate in distinct varieties.

Without the catalyst of dedicated magazines, sf might come apart, like a wire puzzle does when a key link is taken. Once such dismantling starts, no one can re-set any limits since the art remains a riddle from its origins. Far worse, its identity stands in peril.

Identity looms more important than safe prosperity or larger than entertainment, stimulus to fresh departures. For once sf begins to lose its unique status, the lesser needs are driven in its wake.

However, fate is not fixed. Although the field needs more periodicals, not less, they are holding on well. Once choice comes upon readers, editors, writers alike: whether to save the arrangement or to drop the magazines and set a dark course.

Who can tell the trouble that might lie along that uncharted path? The risk shows, but not any apparent gains. If people seek adventures they should ask for bolder experimental stories, not for revolts against our struggling magazines.

John W. Andrews
2301 E. Foothill Dr.
Santa Rosa, Calif. 95404

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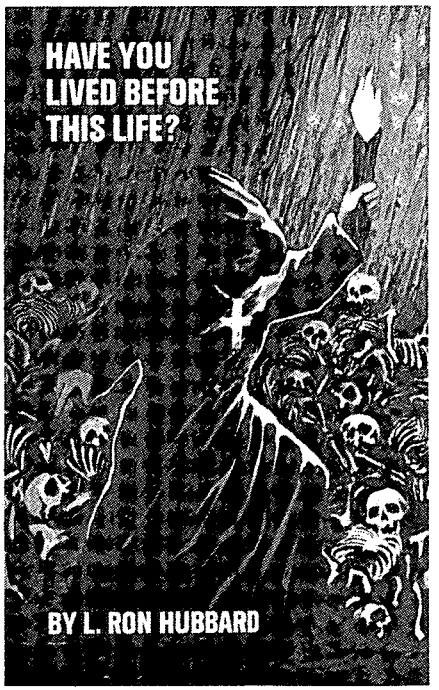

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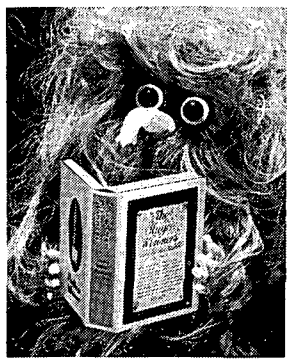

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